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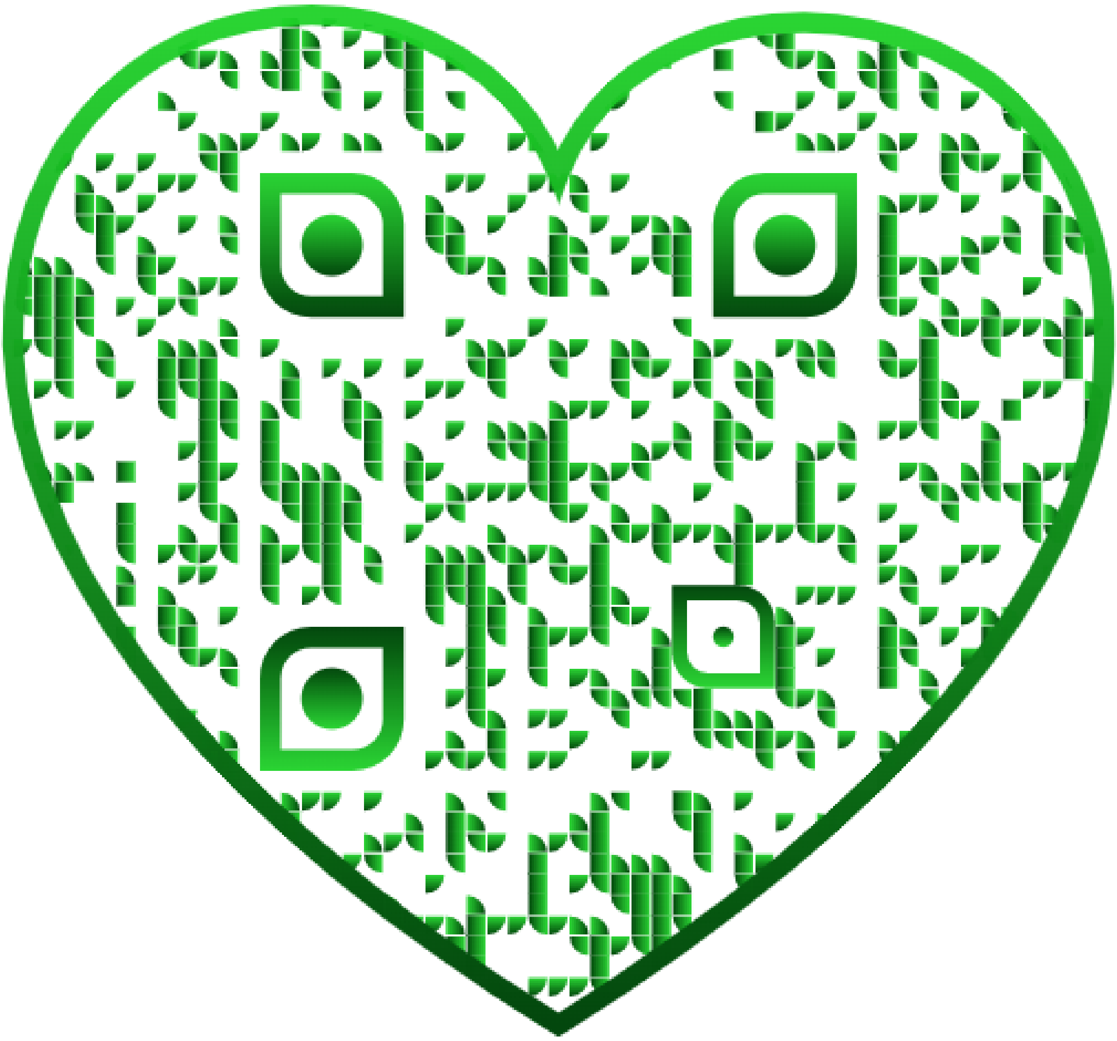

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*THESE PAGES: The future of USAAF airpower during WWII is illustrated in this 1941 view featuring (from the top): Lockheed YP-38 Lightning, Bell P-39D Airacobra, Curtiss P-40C Tomahawk, and Republic YP-43 Lancer. All aircraft would go into mass production except for the Lancer, which was built in limited numbers but was still an effective aircraft that would lead directly to the P-47 Thunderbolt. (USAAF)*

Society of AIR RACING HISTORIANS GOLDEN PYLONS

# MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER

This month, I would like to get on to the aviation scam that just keeps scamming. That means Amelia Earhart. I really do not know what this poor woman did to deserve what is happening to her in 2025/2026 but we now have two different groups vying for the discovery of that elusive Lockheed Model 10E and the ability to "tell the true story" about what happened to Amelia and Fred. We will look at one group in this issue.

I have been buying just about every book on Amelia and was in a used bookstore last month with contributor Joe Scheil. I spotted a book on Amelia that I had not previously seen, pulled it out for a quick examination, and then added it to my stack. Joe gave me a look that said "You've got to be kidding me, not another one." Well, yes. I have even been buying the books by the whack jobs that have made significant Amelia discoveries — the shoe heel, that piece of crumbled aluminum. This really is a growth industry… and a profitable one.

Our resident Amelia conspiracy theorist is Mark Bingham and we recently got into one of our rather protracted discussions on the matter. Mark and I had noted the most recent scam involving Amelia has to do with — and to their ever-lasting shame — Purdue University.

The 2 October 2025 edition of CBS News (quickly followed up by a lengthy 24 October 2025 *Flying* magazine article) boldly announced to a viewership already stunned by negative news from around the globe that "Amelia Earhart's long-lost plane likely located in lagoon, expedition team claims." Mark and I already sorta suspected it was in that location, but I digress.

The team, well, given the importance of all this, we probably should be referring to them as THE TEAM, had found "very strong evidence." We all know, you just can't go wrong with "very strong evidence," especially when it is found by THE TEAM.

Mark noted that the researchers from Purdue University were set to head off to the South Pacific to find the real facts about a "visual anomaly" spotted on a remote bit of sand and whether this "visual anomaly" is actually what is now the very well-abused Lockheed. THE TEAM has even given the anomaly a name straight out of the *X Files* — it is now the "Taraia Object" (cue in theme music).

The Taraia Object was, according to THE TEAM, apparently identified from satellite imagery taken in 2020 of a lagoon on the small island of Nikumaroro. This is located 400 miles southeast of Howland Island. Yes, *that* Howland where Amelia and Fred were supposed to land for fuel and light snacks back in July 1937. According to THE TEAM, the Taraia Object (theme music again, please) has been visible in photos going back to 1938. Say what? Amelia and Fred said their final goodbyes in July 1937. That leads me to wonder about who took the photos, what have they been doing with them, etc.

It all starts getting better. THE TEAM consists of 15 high-rankers from Purdue University, Purdue Research Foundation (they are the ones that funded the original Lockheed Model 10E), and the ever-popular Archaeological Legacy Institute of Eugene, Oregon. Apparently, stops had already been made at local outlets of The Gap, Urban Outfitters, and L.L. Bean so clothing that identified members of THE TEAM as "explorers of the infinite unknown" could be purchased — along with large buttons stating "I R An Explorer."

But wait, there's more. During September 2025, members of THE TEAM traveled (certainly not on their own dime) to the Museum of Flight to view the Model 10 on display and study rivet patterns. Seriously. This aircraft was part of an earlier scam — Linda Finch's recreation of the Earhart flight. After examining rivet patterns, the explorers could turn to each other and say with unwavering conviction, "yes, that is definitely a rivet pattern."

THE TEAM was set to depart for Nikumaroro on 4 November 2025. Rather than parachuting in or making some other dramatic form of arrival worthy of true explorers, THE TEAM would arrive by boat and first began taking photos and videos of the site. This would be followed by the use of magnetometers and sonar devices to scan the area. They would then join hands and do a foot-by-foot walk-over of the area, looking for bits of aluminum which surely would still be in place after 88 years of constant tidal action. "Egad! I discern a rivet pattern!" Then, in a moment of extreme reverence, the Taraia Object (cue theme) would be dredged and lifted from its watery grave so that further rivet patterns could be discerned.

It gets even crazier. "We have gathered satellite images, did historical research [NO! Not historical research — what is the world coming to?], and found other imagery that relates to it [an ambiguous statement at best]," said Richard Pettigrew, who holds the title of executive director of the Archaeological Legacy Institute. Then, as if this would aid their already questionable status, Dick states that THE TEAM has found that The International Group for Historic Aircraft (TIGHAR), and certainly the scam artists of scam artists when it comes to Fred and Amelia, has collected evidence that supports THE TEAM.

In an instance of the pot calling the kettle black, Ric Gillespie, executive director of TIGHAR (they do love their titles), simply brushed the whole thing off when he stated on NBC News during July, "We've looked in that spot… there is nothing there." Oops! One down for the Dickster.

Mark notes the fact that Gillespie has taken upwards of eight vacation trips (paid for by his starry-eyed acolytes) to the South Pacific in search for the wreck of the Lockheed. The sum of their discoveries: A rubber heel from a woman's shoe.

In many ways, Amelia was the *original* Earhart scam artist. She and her husband George Putnam pulled out all stops trying to find (fleece) money from a bewildering series of sponsors and individuals. One of the books I showed Joe was entirely on Earhart sponsors and there were dozens upon dozens of them. The need for money kept increasing at a frantic pace and this pushed the risk factor of the flights even higher.

For a short period, Mark notes that Amelia was an adjunct celebrity career counselor during the 1930s at Purdue. The University contributed funds to make the Lockheed into a "flying laboratory" (something it never was) and this apparently justified Purdue sending three representatives to join THE TEAM. Sirisha Bandla and Mac Hagle are alumni and members of Purdue's "Cradle of Astronauts" while Steve Schultz, senior vice president and general counsel, is just a lowly field assistant to the expedition.

Mark reasons, as do I, that there is no better use of hard-earned student tuition dollars than to send a fantasy research team on a boondoggle vacation trip to search for something that does not exist. None of these individuals are remotely qualified to do anything related to actual aviation expedition work and this so-called expedition was doomed to certain failure on multiple levels from the very start.

Thousands of people and governmental entities have researched the Earhart disappearance in detail from all aspects. Websites and newsletters abound with the latest theories and findings. Readers, and all would-be expeditionists, would best serve their mystery thirst by reading Mike Campbell's 2016 book (second edition) titled *Amelia Earhart: The Truth At Last* to find an unbiased comprehensive evaluation of all past research work on the topic. That, or simply read Mark's "Log Entries" regarding Amelia.

Suddenly, as we go to press with this issue, the Nikumaroro clown car has come to a screeching halt, casting members of THE TEAM asunder. On 7 November 2025, Fox News reported that the Taraia Object Expedition has been halted for the time being and "postponed to 2026, given the onset of the South Pacific cyclone season." It is unclear if it will resume but what is clear is that members of THE TEAM are an embarrassment to themselves and to anything to do with legitimate aviation history.

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CHINA BLITZERS!
COST OF WAR
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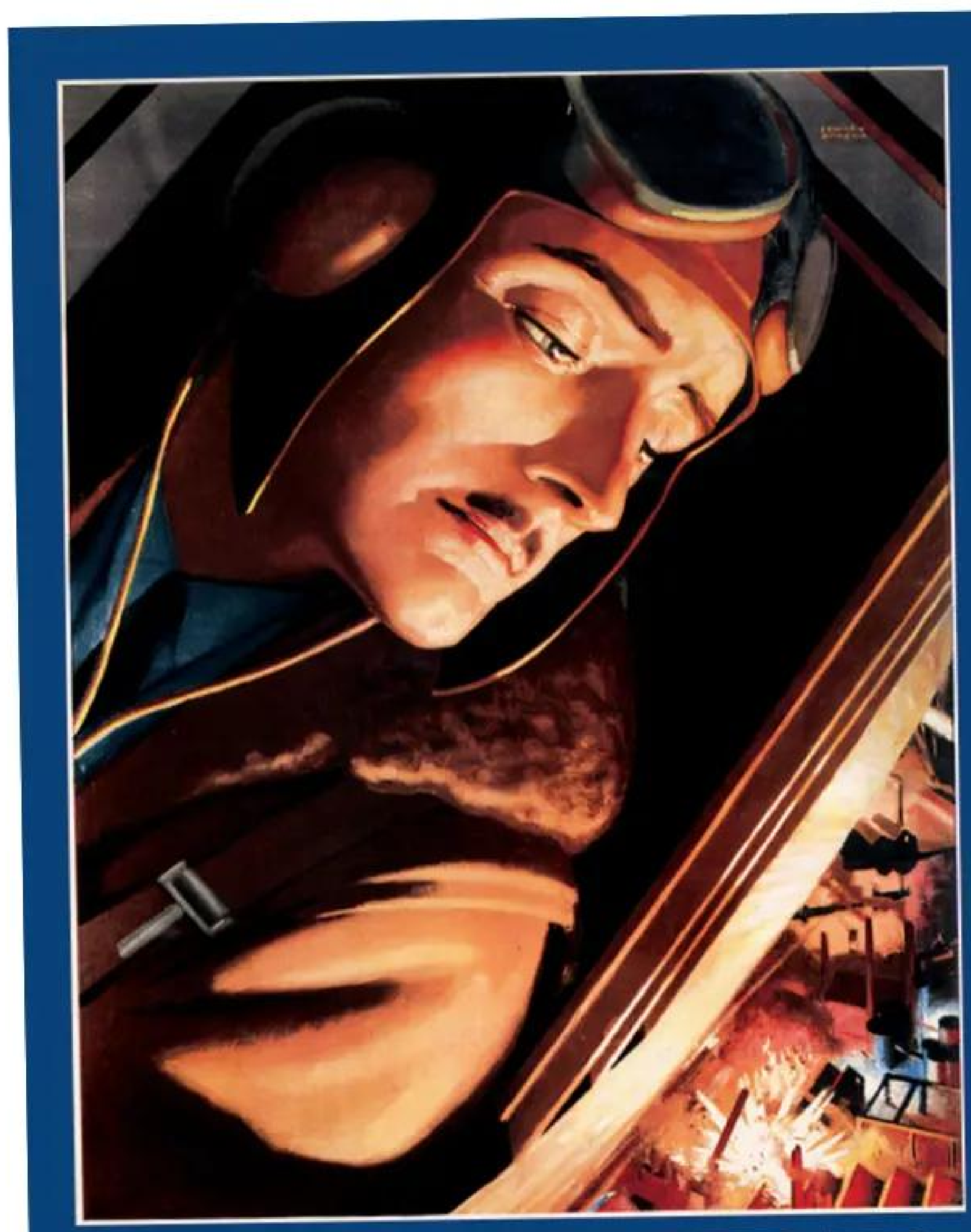
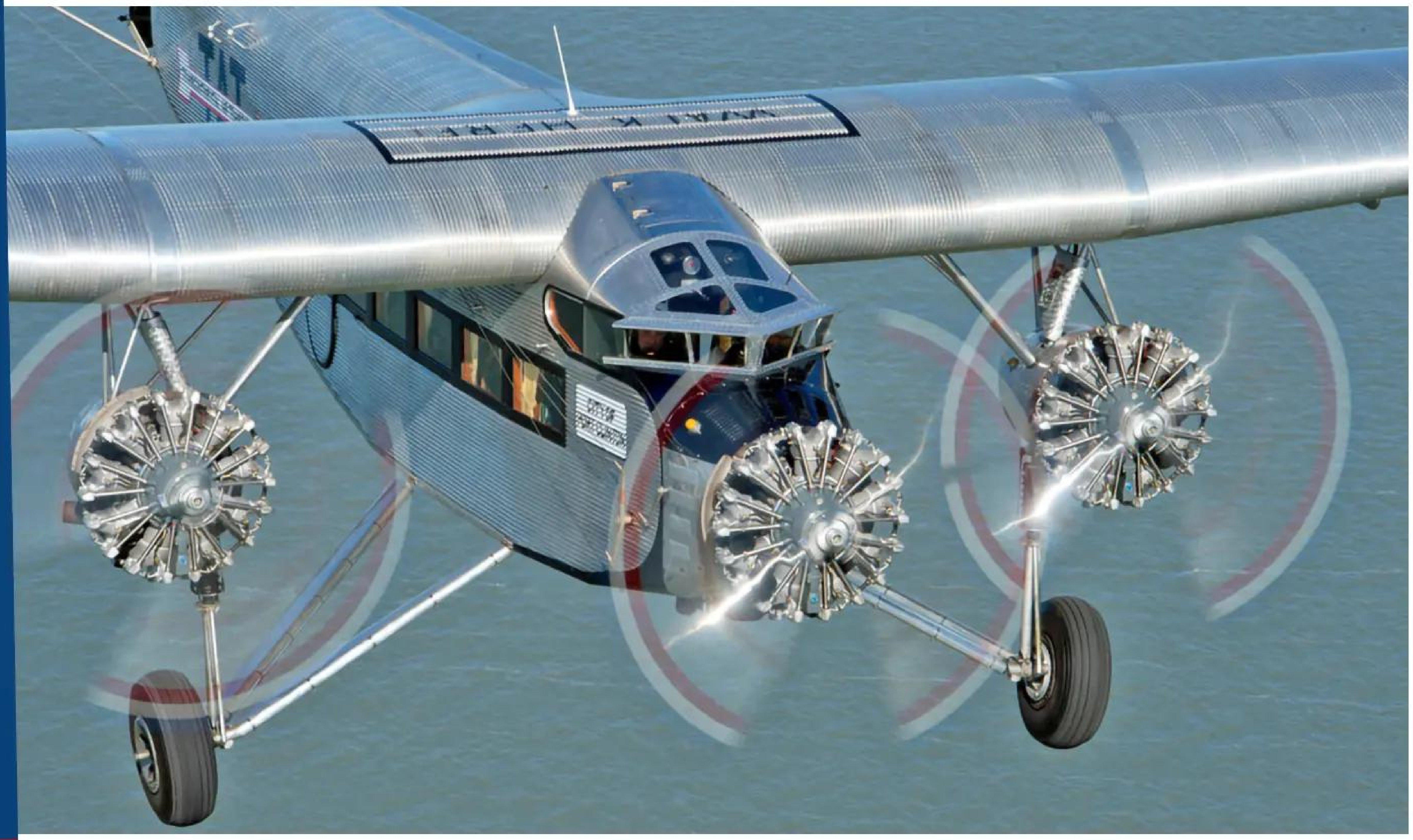


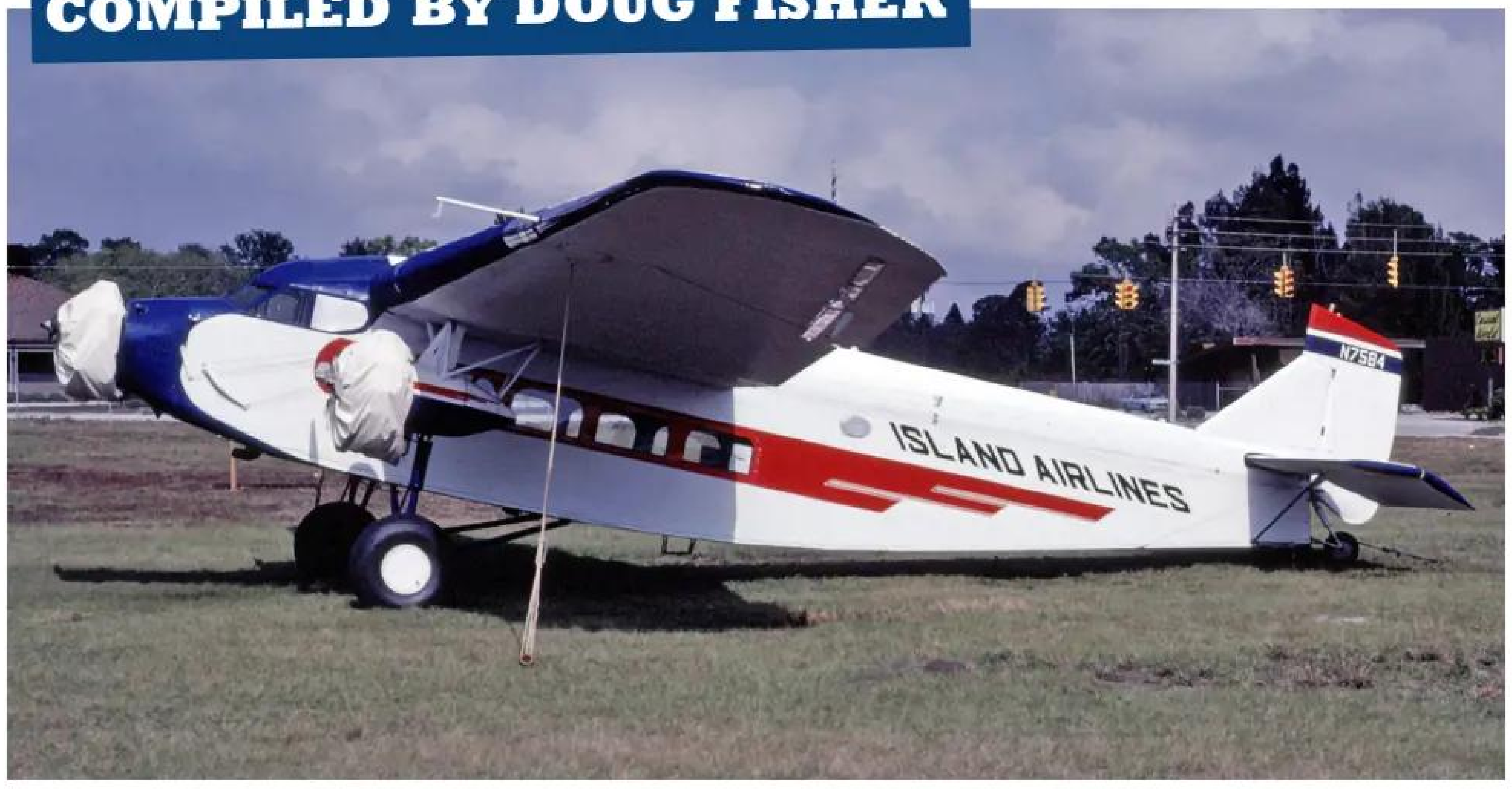
# WARBIRD & CLASSIC REPORT

KEEP 'EM FLYING!

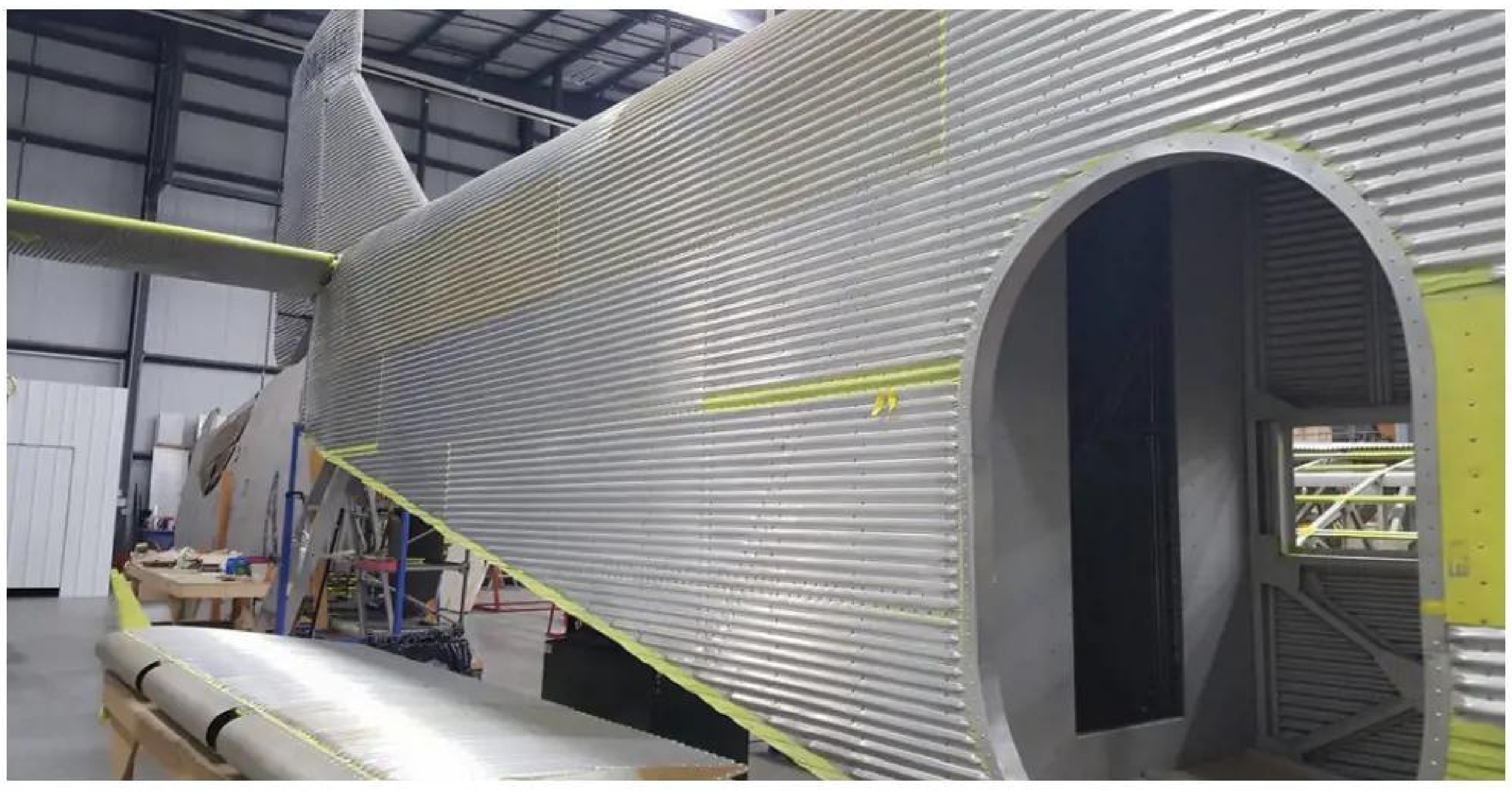
COMPILED BY DOUG FISHER



**The Liberty Aviation Museum currently operates Ford 5-AT-B NC9645 on a regular flying schedule.**



**One of the numerous Tri-Motors operated by Island over the years.**



**The fuselage displaying the all-new corrugated metal.**

## TRI-MOTOR GAINS ITS WINGS

An important milestone was reached with the attaching of the wings to the fuselage of the Ford Tri-Motor being restored by the Liberty Aviation Museum in Port Clinton, Ohio. The rare aircraft is registered NC9684 and, like most of the surviving three-engine transports, has led an interesting life. After being completed, it was delivered to the *Compania Mexicana de Aviacion* on 1 May 1929 with the registration of X-ABCF (this would later be modernized to XA-BCF) and the majority of shares in this airline were owned by Pan American Airways whose Juan Trippe wanted to extend the reach of his airline. The aircraft flew the Brownsville, Texas, to Mexico City route and would go to other locations as needed.

On 1 November 1936, Pan Am became the outright owner of the aircraft and it assumed its original registration of NC9684. It flew on the Key West, Florida, to Havana, Cuba, route but on 15 June 1938, it would become the property of *Cubana de Aviacion* but this was rather deceptive since this airline was also mainly owned by Pan Am. While flying from the tropical nation, the Tri-Motor assumed the registration of NM-24.

It would be leaving for much colder climes during July 1946. With the war over, Milton "Milt" Hershberger was looking for more aircraft to operate with his Island Air Service. Flying out of Port Clinton, these aircraft serviced Ohio's Bass Islands. During the summer months, the planes would haul tourists and NM-24 became N69905 and flew from the little airline's main base on Put-In-Bay Airport located in South Bass Island. Hershberger was a smart customer who had bought out the Ford factory's entire Tri-Motor spare parts inventory for a minimal investment. After the war, he bought many surplus N3N-3s and stripped them for engines to utilize on the Tri-Motors.

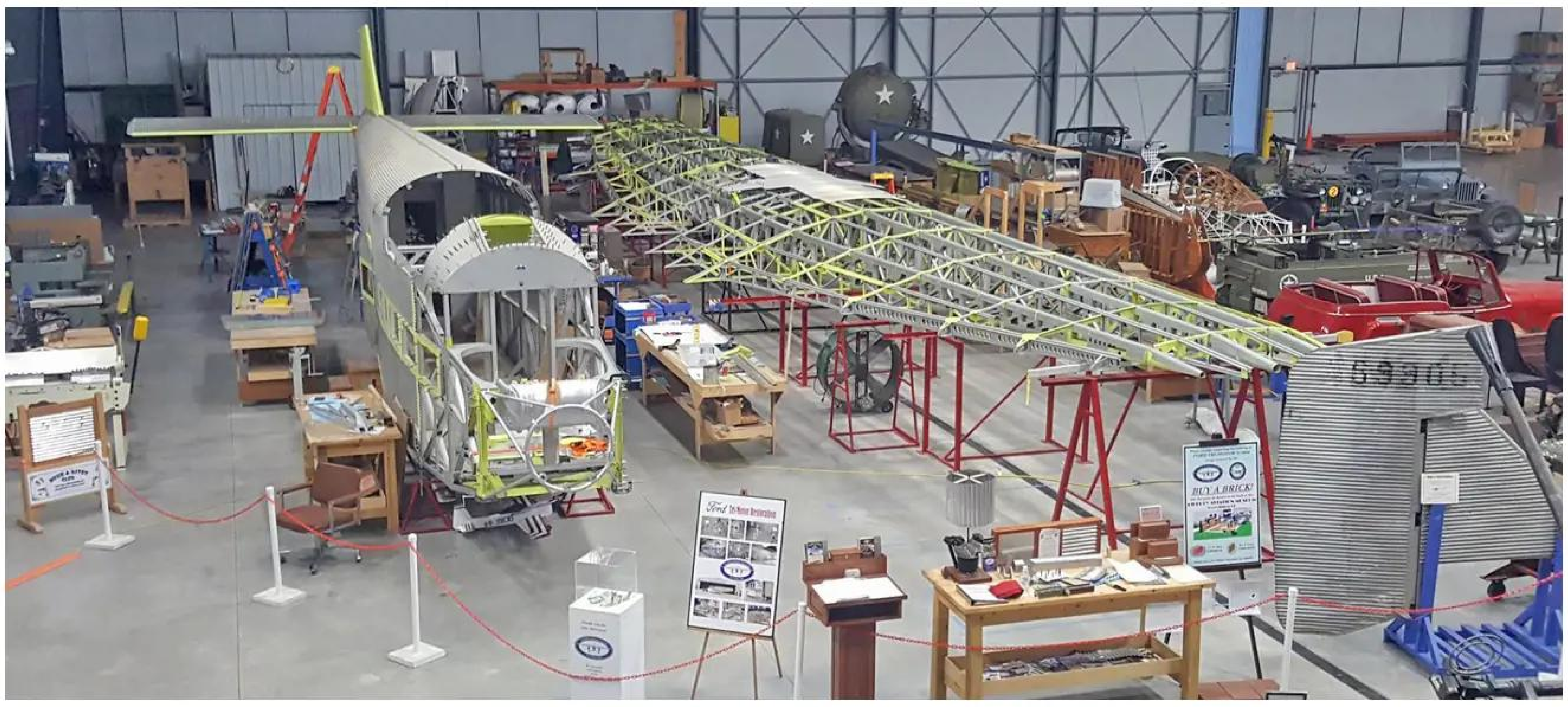
The planes also flew students to and from school while hauling just about everything else imaginable all through the winter months. Hershberger would eventually sell out and the company would become known as Island Airlines with the title "World's Shortest Airline." The distinctive Tri-Motors clattered between islands well into the 1970s.

However, N69905 would only stay with the airline until 1952 and that is when it was sold to Charles "Frenny" Frensdorf of Orofino, Idaho, and the plane would enter an entirely new life. At this point in time, the transport had been heavily modified with Wright R-975 radials, oleo struts from a P-47, wheels from a Lockheed Lodestar, and numerous other mods to keep it going and making money.

It was sold rather quickly to the famed Johnson Flying Service of Missoula, Montana, and joined the line's other Tri-Motors in dropping smoke jumpers near raging forest fires but that career would not last long. On 17 August 1953, the aircraft set out on a smoke-jumper mission but that would end in disaster.

Smoke-jumper Bob Graham was one of eight men who would survive the crash wrote the following article that appeared in the July 2009 issue of *Smokejumper*, the quarterly journal of the National Smokejumper Association. Bob describes what happened: "Six of us were dispatched to three fires in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Included in this load were spotter Dick Conklin along with jumpers Dave Owen, Torky Chorbajian, Donald Kerr, Fritz Wolfrum, and Frank Wolfe. We took off in N69905 but upon arriving over the fires, we found that it was too windy to jump. We landed at the Spotted Bear RS strip to wait and try to jump later in the day. Around suppertime, we took off to try to jump the fires before dark. As we began to gain altitude, one of the engines quit. One of the reasons we liked the Ford was that it had three engines. Shortly after, a second died. We were all suited up and I was closest to the door and immediately looked out to the rapidly-closing ground. It was questionable in my mind as to whether there was enough altitude to jump so I looked up to the cabin spotter, Dick Conklin. He saw what I was considering and, shaking his head, pointed to me to return to the cabin floor.

A major milestone took place during October when the wings of the Tri-Motor were attached.



The project during October 2016. Note the fin and rudder on the right with the registration 69905.

Construction of a wing panel underway during 2014.

Preparing the wings for installation on the fuselage.

Rebuilding an engine nacelle.

Another milestone took place when the engines were installed on the painted fuselage.

"As I did that, the third engine quiet and we crashed. Kenny Roth was the pilot and he fought the plane all the way to the ground, hitting tail first. I was knocked unconscious and must have been out awhile as when I did come to, there was no one else around. I had been buried by all the fire gear and everyone else had already gone past me and left the plane.

"Remember, I was closest to the door. I freed myself and scooted down the floor to the door and got halfway out when I heard voices hollering at me to get up and run and that the plane was about to blow up. Being extremely well educated, I thought that would be a good idea and wondered why I was not doing exactly that.

Then I noticed my left leg and ankle were broken and hollered back that I could not walk, let alone run. My brave brethren, who all had to crawl over me to exit the plane, now abandoned all caution and began to administer to my immediate needs. This consisted of tearing the sleeve off my new work shirt and administering Demerol." Although no one was killed in the crash, everyone was injured — some badly. The Tri-Motor was a ruin. It looked like it was going to be a long night as the injured men attempted to administer to each other but that is when Fred Brauer and Bob Johnson flew into the little strip in the Johnson Twin Beech. Bob along with the others that had been badly injured were loaded into the Twin Beech which then took off in the darkness and had to avoid wandering moose before getting airborne.

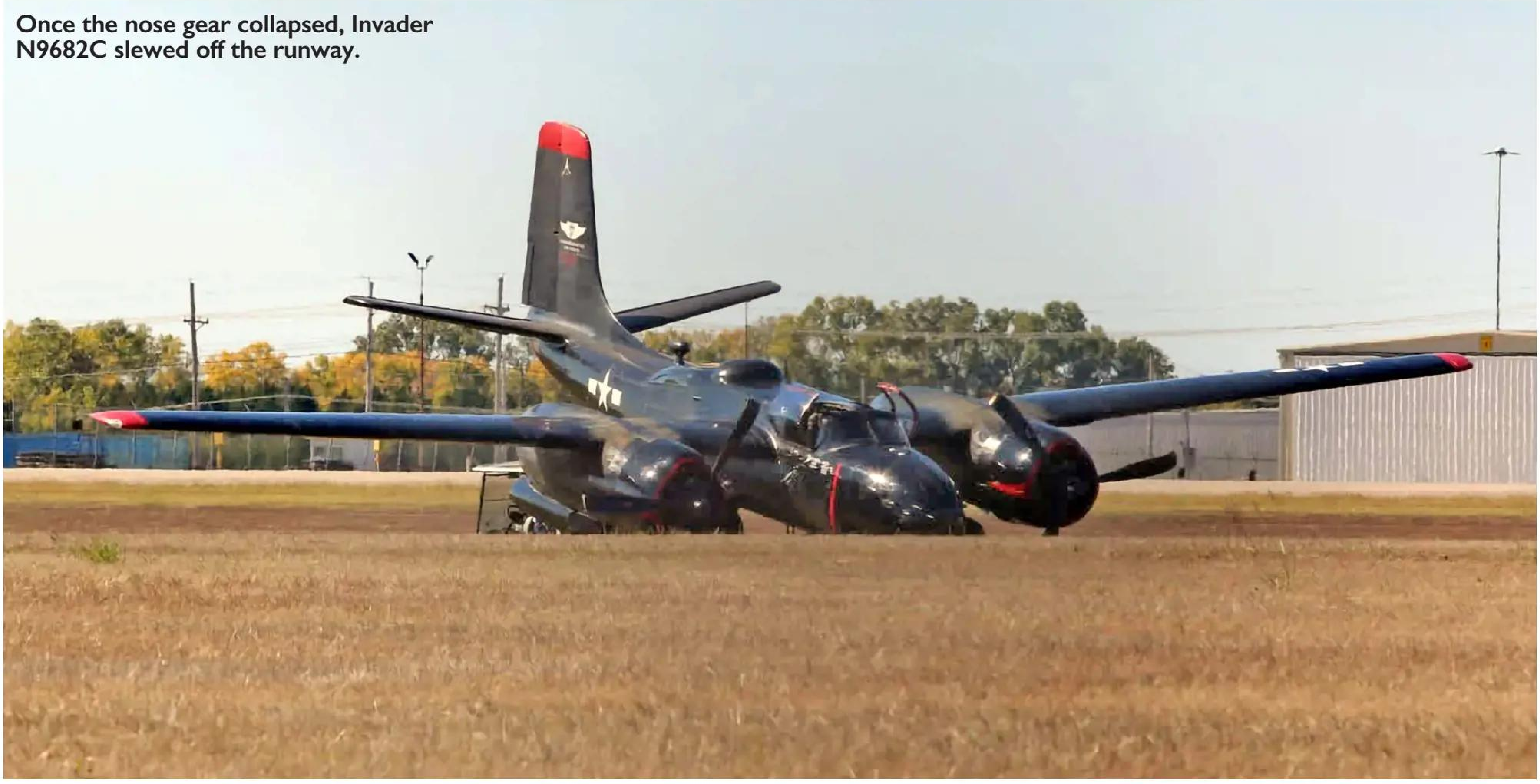
As for the Tri-Motor, it was stripped of anything useful and the wreckage was just left were it crashed. In 1984, Maurice Hovious found the wreck and transported it back to Vicksburg, Michigan, where he operates Hov-Aire Inc. His company has been responsible for returning a number of wrecked Tri-Motors to the sky but this aircraft had been very badly damaged and then suffered from years of exposure. The wreck was put aside while other aircraft were repaired and made airworthy.

On 7 December 1991, the Liberty Aviation Museum was officially established and the main intent was to display a collection of WWII aircraft. After construction of new facilities, the museum opened in 2012. It soon became obvious that the Port Clinton location was linked forever with the Tri-Motor and contact was made with Maurice Hovious who delivered a presentation on the restoration of Kermit Weeks' Tri-Motor N7584 that had been badly damaged in 1992's Hurricane *Andrew*. Local pilot Ken Benjamin talked with Maurice about creating a static Tri-Motor to display at the airfield.

Maurice made a generous offer — he would supply the expertise and materials needed to build a Tri-Motor in return for labor supplied by volunteers from the EAA's Chapter 1247. The first pieces of Ford 5-AT-B N69905 began to arrive at the museum — but Maurice insisted the plane be returned to flying condition. The Tri-Motor Heritage Foundation was established to supply support for the project. Much of the structure was found to be too far gone for restoration and had to be built bit by bit from new using the wrecked parts as patterns.

Ed Patrick is the CEO of the Liberty Aviation Museum and in 2012 he offered to move the project into a new built hangar at the museum. Thus, it was much easier to work on the project and greater progress was made. During 2014, Liberty was able to purchase Ford 5-AT-B NC9645 from the failing Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum in Oregon. This aircraft was placed back into flying condition in its original Transcontinental Air Transport markings as *City of Wichita* while *City of Port Clinton* has also been added. Rides were sold in this Tri-Motor and profits supported the restoration of NC9684 which is being finished in the red, white, and blue colors of Island Airlines.

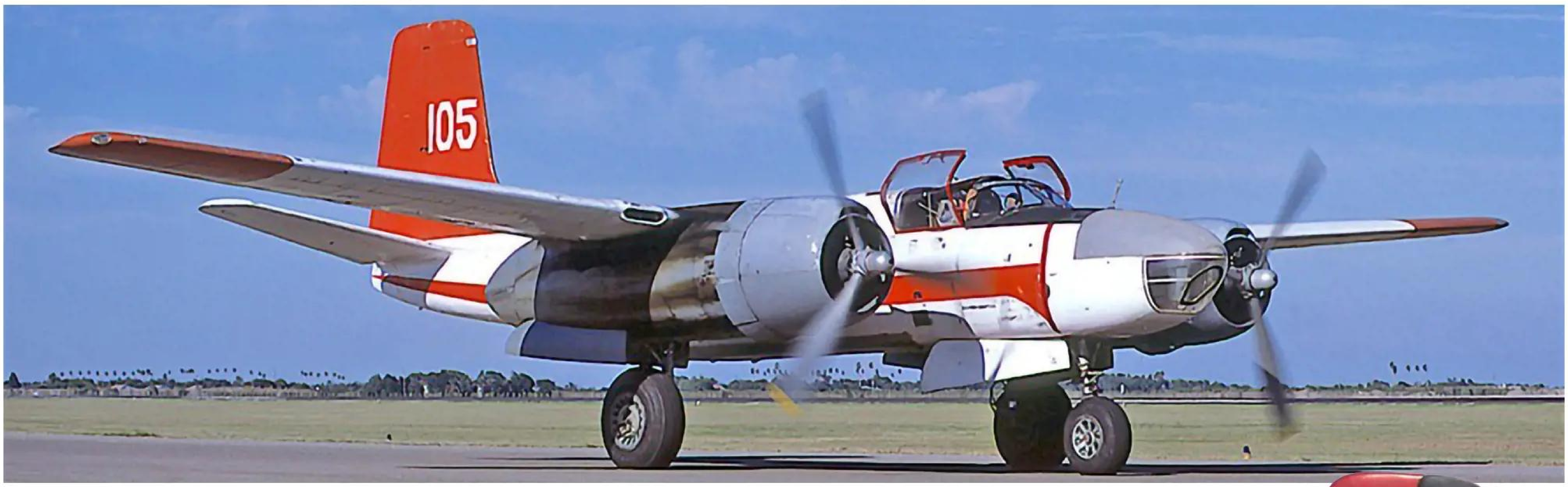
It has been a huge project but step by painful step, the Tri-Motor has been reborn. We will be presenting a major story on the plane when it is completed, utilizing material from the William T. Larkins Ford Tri-Motor Archive that is held by *Air Classics*. We wish to thank the Liberty Aviation Museum for the photographs and information about the restoration.



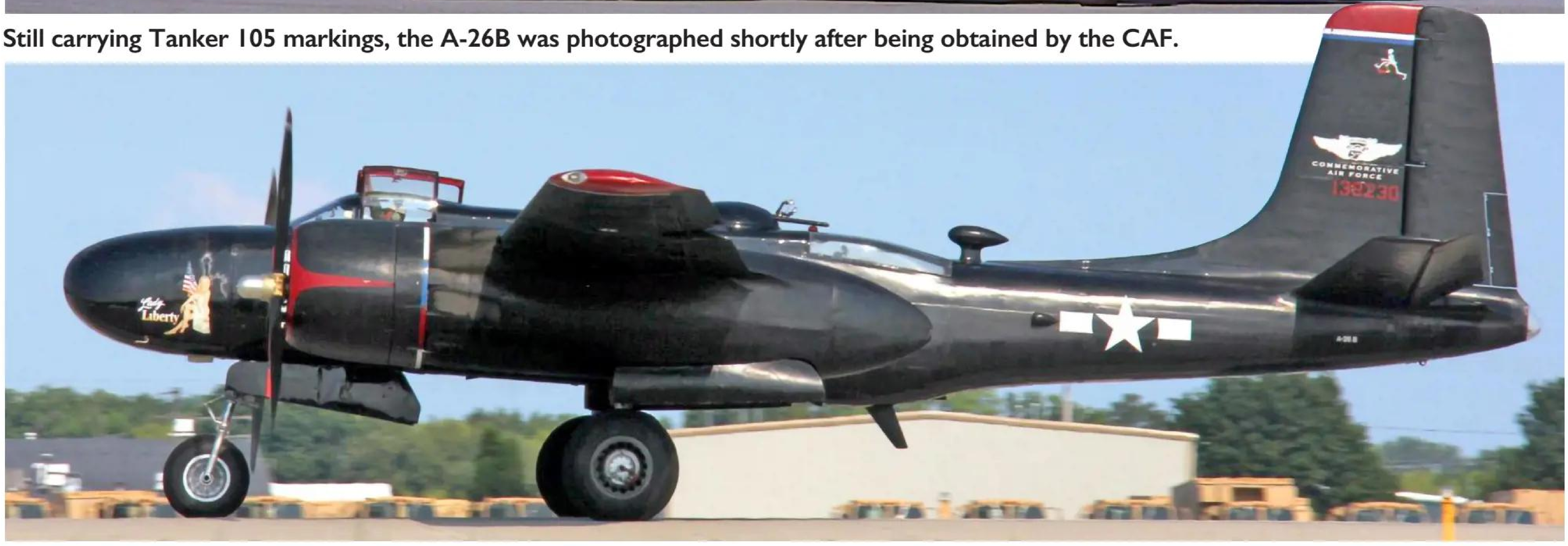
**Once the nose gear collapsed, Invader N9682C slewed off the runway.**

## CAF INVADER DOWN

On 1 November 2025, Douglas A-26B Invader N9682C apparently suffered a nose gear failure while attempting to takeoff from Ponca City Regional Airport in Oklahoma. There were no injuries when the aircraft swerved off the runway and onto adjacent grass. Damage was not as bad as could be, but the plane will undoubtedly be expensive to repair — especially considering the not overly-high value of Invaders on the current Warbird market. Built as A-26B-20-DL USAAF 41-39230, this aircraft actually saw service during WWII when it served with the 9th Air Force's 410th Bomb Group while operating out of Great Dunmow, England. It is noted that the aircraft was damaged by *Luftwaffe* fighters during early 1945. Sold surplus in the late 1950s as N9682C, the Invader was soon with Bill Dempsey's Central Air Service in Rantoul, Kansas, where it was modified as a sprayer and fire-bomber, flying as Tanker 105. By the late 1970s, Invaders had become popular high-speed drug runners and N9682C was no exception. Confiscated by the Fed, the plane was sold in a 1980 auction and began operating with the then-Confederate Air Force. Over the years, the planes has gone through several CAF wings and carried several names, the most recent being *Lady Liberty*.



**Still carrying Tanker 105 markings, the A-26B was photographed shortly after being obtained by the CAF.**



***Lady Liberty* in happier times.**

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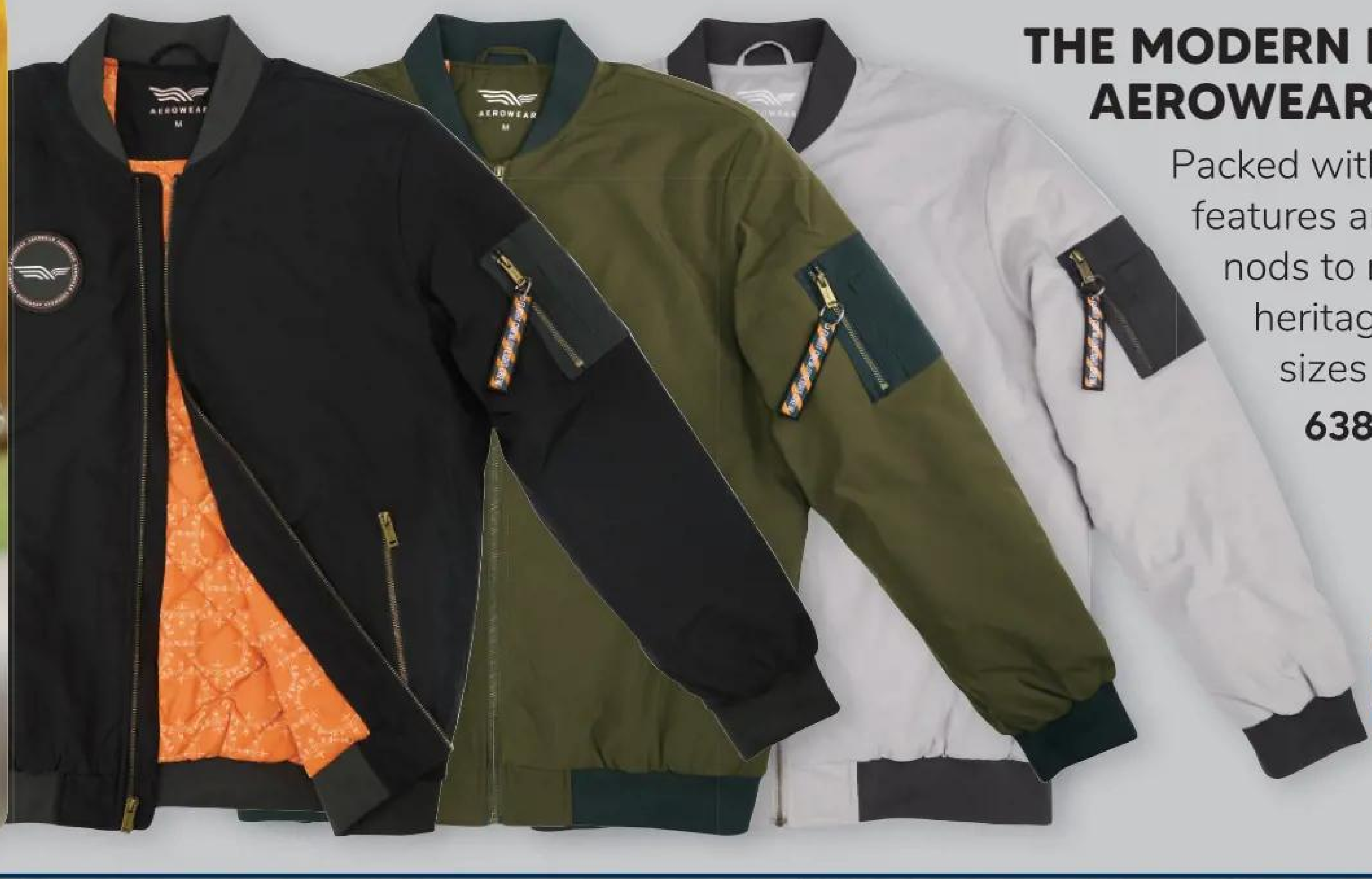

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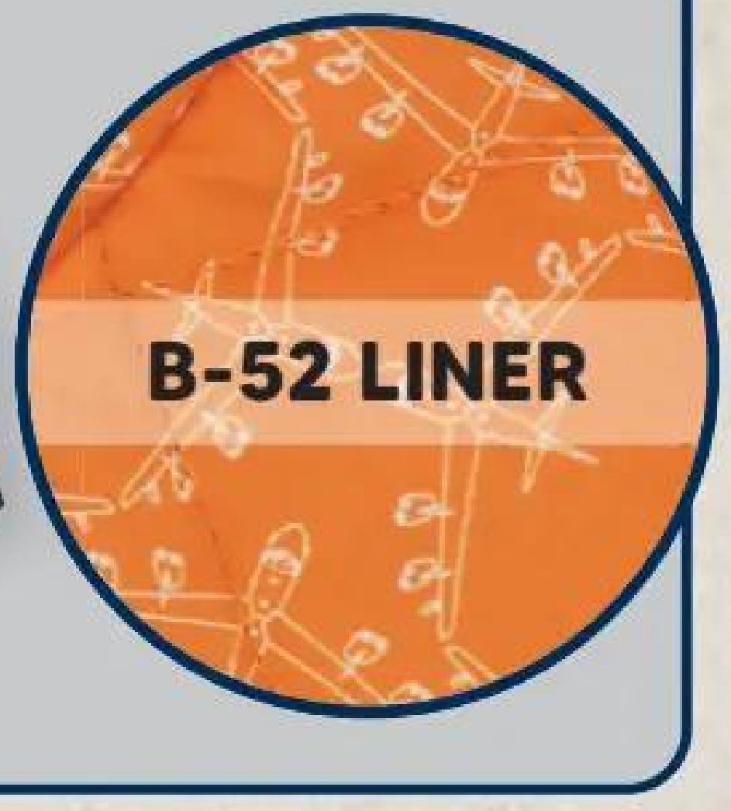

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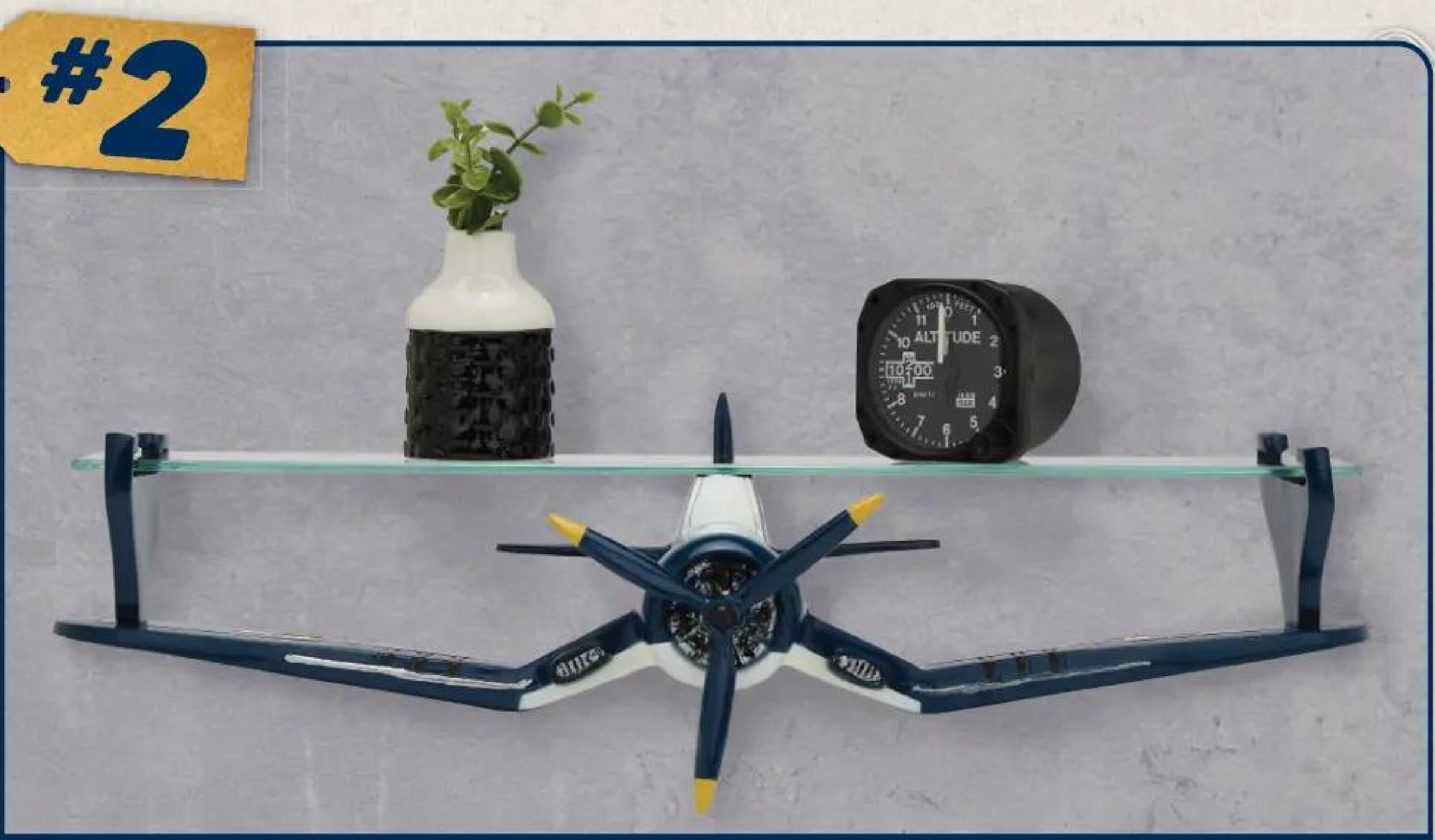

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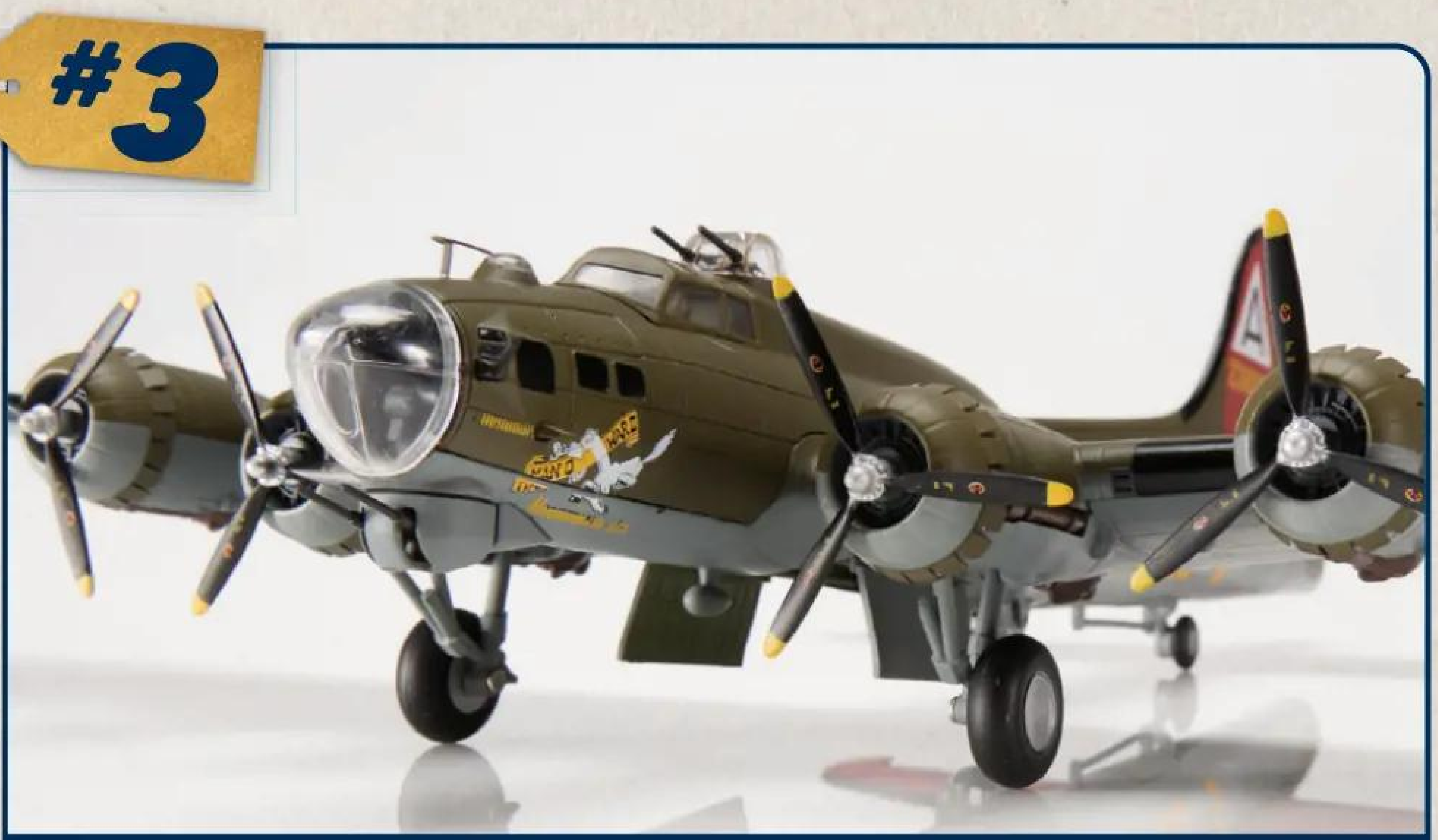

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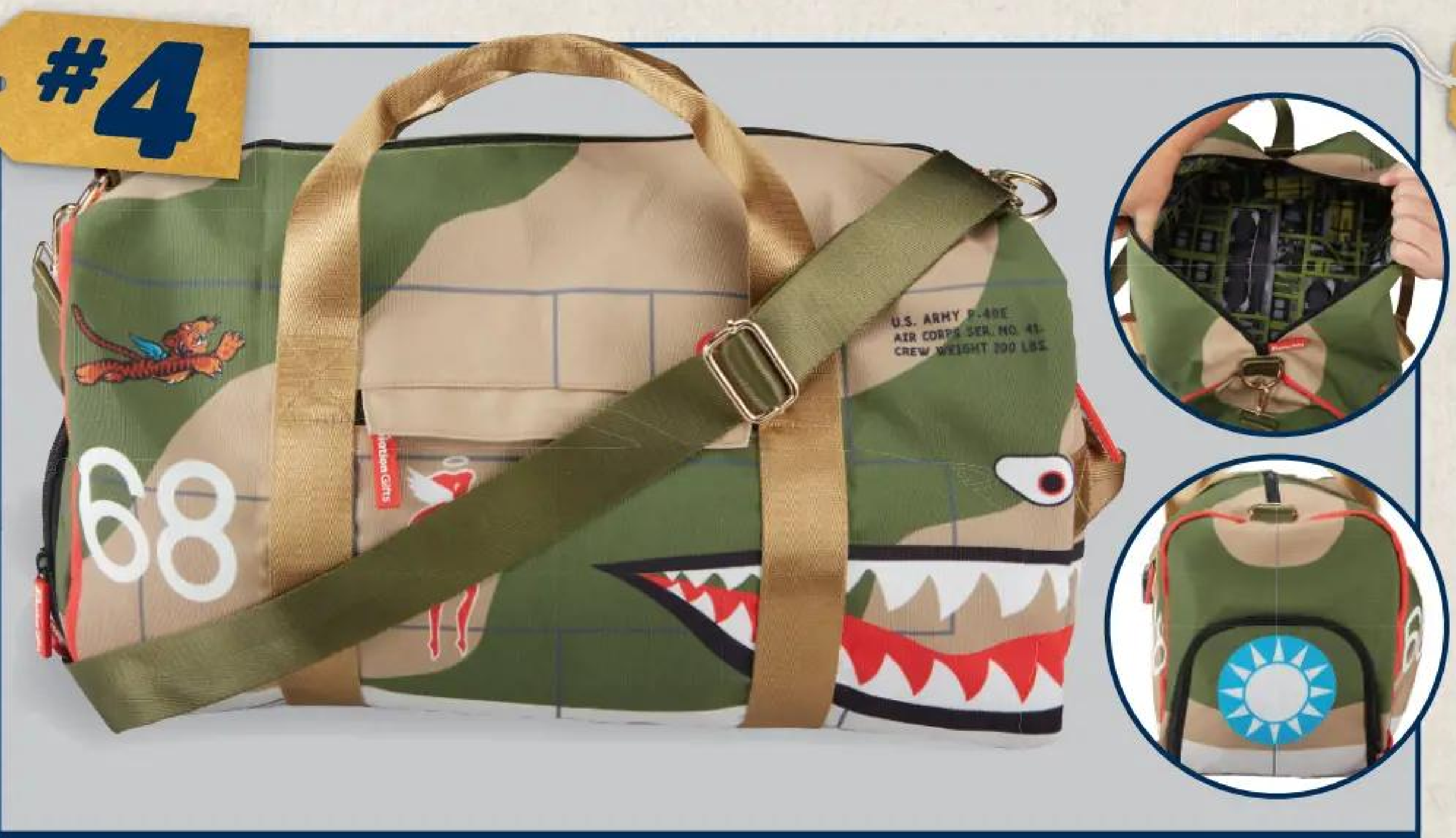

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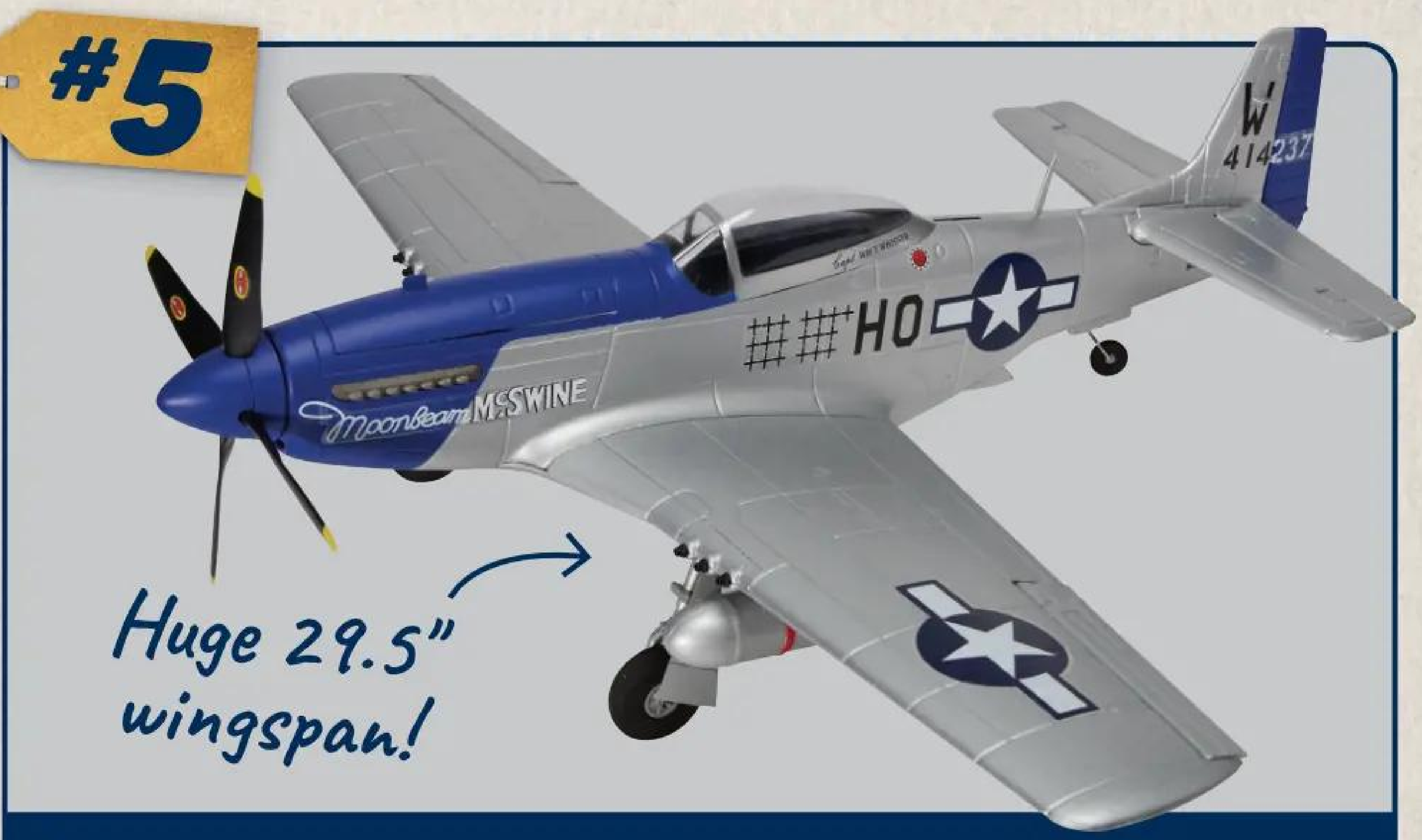

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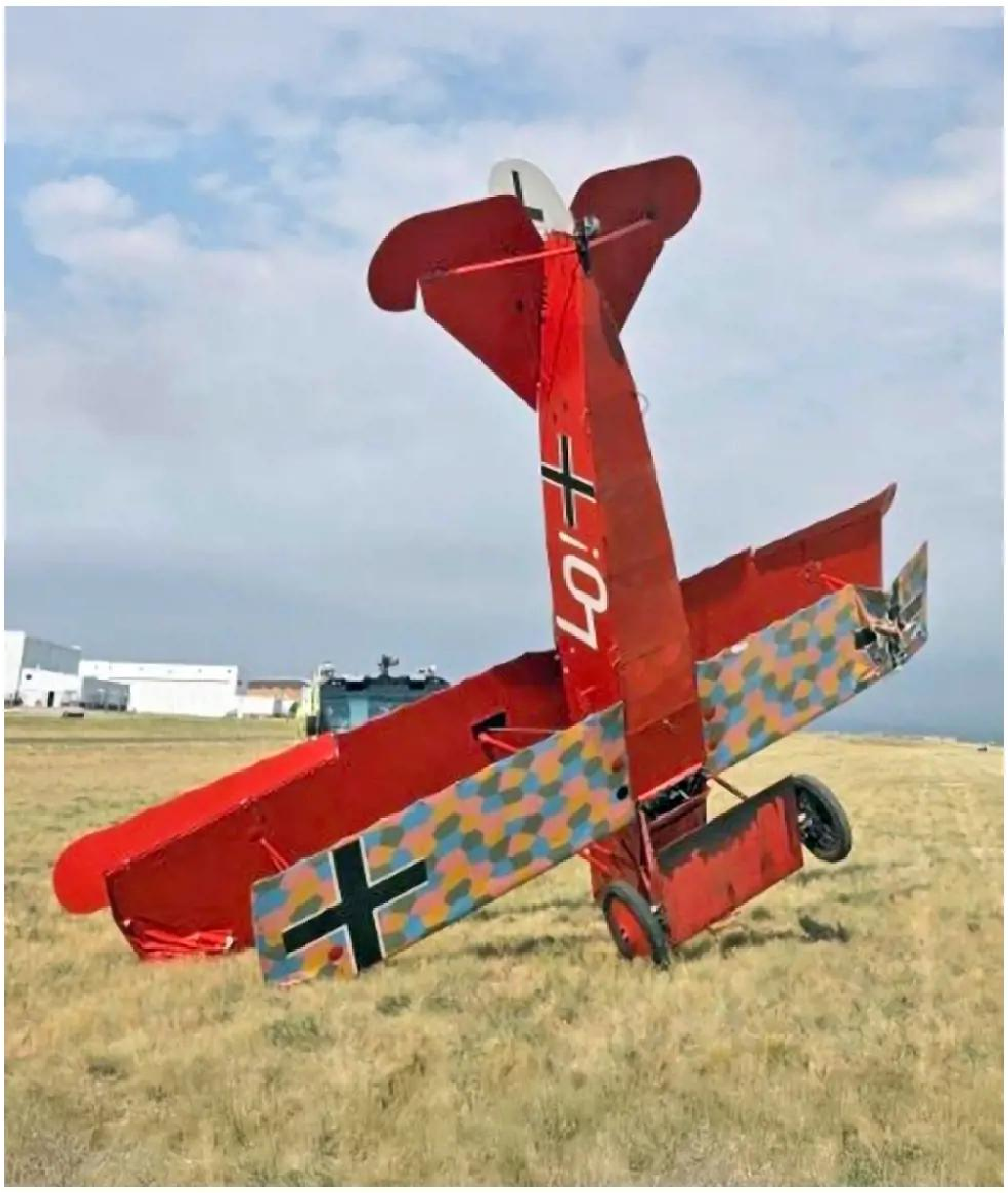
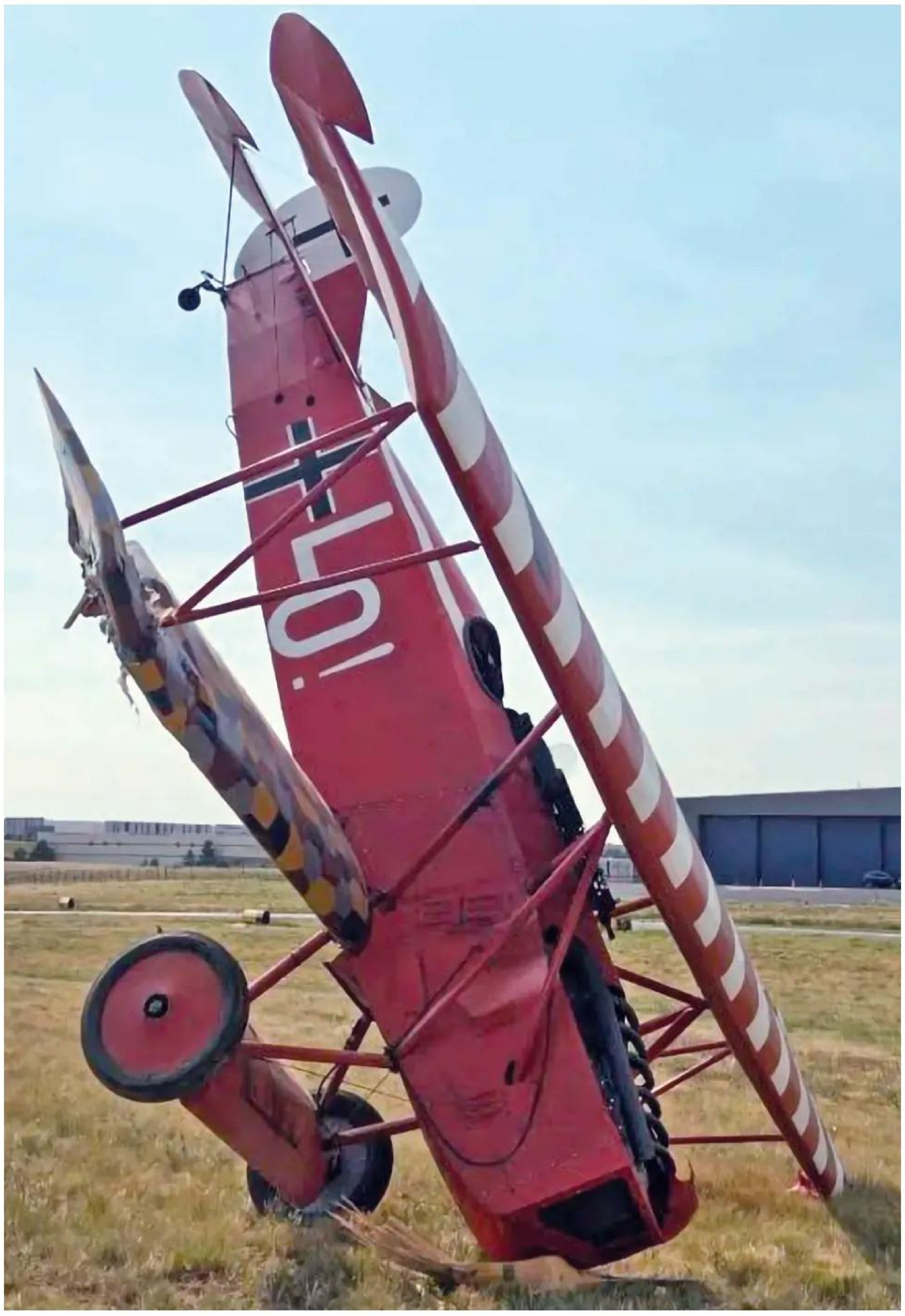


**The Fokker D.VII on its nose following a ground loop.**

## FOKKER ON ITS NOSE

Fokker D.VII replica N18852 was damaged on 22 August during landing at Englewood, Colorado. It appears the tailwheel malfunctioned and this resulted in the aircraft departing the runway and going into a ground loop. The aircraft then wound up on its nose. The upper left wing and lower right wing sustained substantial damage.



**Cause of the accident was a malfunctioning tailwheel.**

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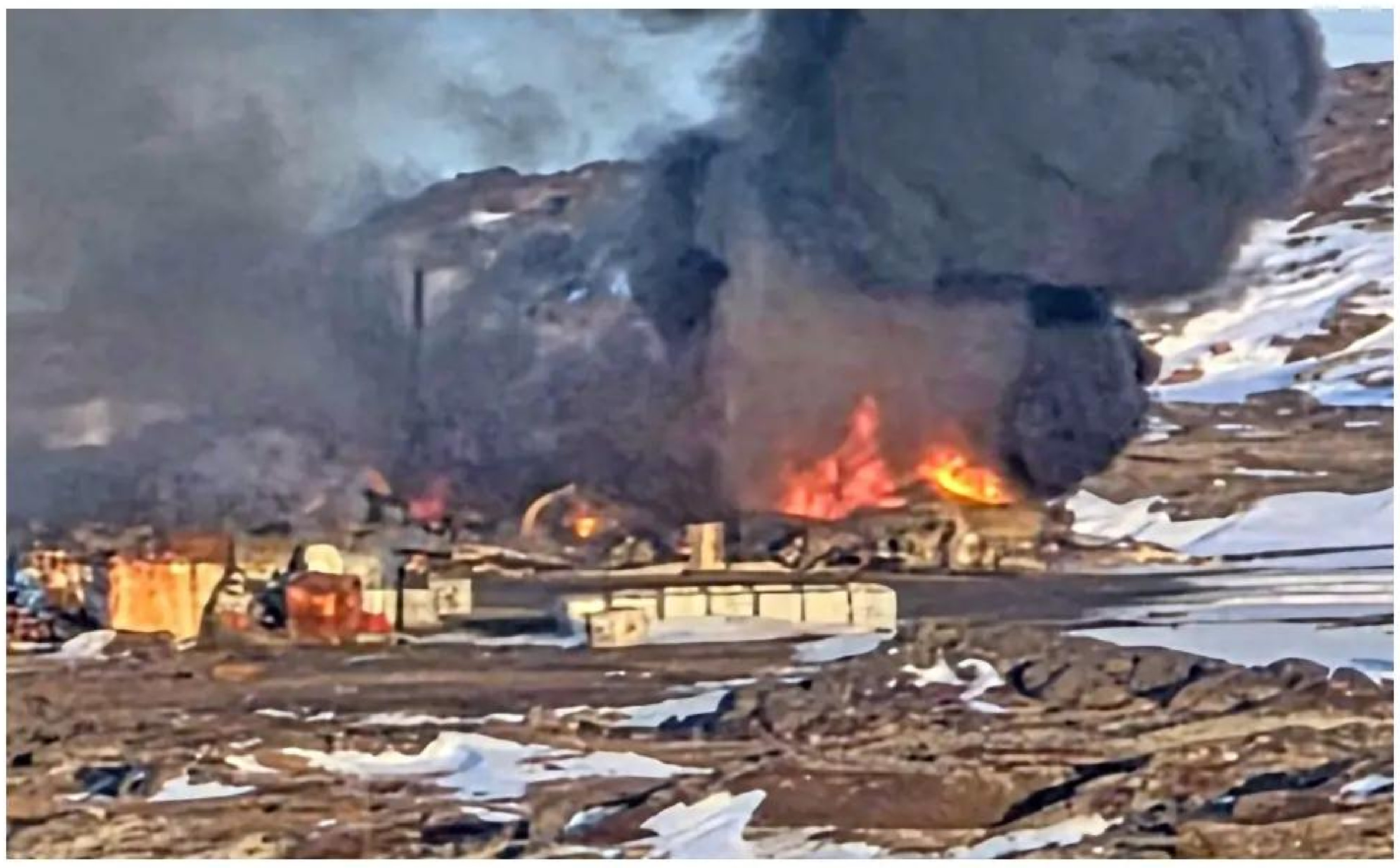

**The warehouse recovery equipment burns on 18 October.**

## ICECAP LIGHTNING EXPEDITION SETBACK

The group attempting to drill into the Greenland Ice Cap to possibly retrieve another P-38 Lightning has suffered what may be its final setback. A notice sent out to expedition backers states that the group's storage warehouse in Greenland burned to the ground, destroying 75% of the expedition's equipment and gear. "Much of the equipment was poised for the immediate resourcing for the 2026 season, targeted for early May 2026," stated the group's news release, "Between radar equipment, aviation related items, deep well pumps, custom spider baskets, hot water pressure units and more, it was a huge loss for our project. We are saddened that this will now deeply impact our project and postpone our 2026 season. We will be actively looking for sponsorship in order to continue our endeavors." Whether or not this remains a viable project is probably debatable.

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Hunter N335AX turning final for landing.

Hunter N335AX was operating on a Naval contract when the accident took place.

## HUNTER EJECTION

Airborne Tactical Advantage Company (ATAC) has lost another Hawker Hunter. The aircraft had departed Oxnard Airport on 15 October 2025 and headed out west of Big Sur, California, where it was operating as ATAC-12 in conjunction with the US Navy. Registered N335AX (it was an ex-Swiss Air Force F Mk. 58). Something happened to the vintage jet while it was maneuvering over the Pacific. The pilot ejected and was rescued with what was initially reported as serious spinal injuries but he was later released from the hospital. Another Hunter, ATAC-11/N326X, flew over the area until "Rescue 04," a US Navy SAR MH-60 from NAS Lemoore responded and pulled the pilot out of the water and flew him to Stanford medical center.

The Hunter was maneuvering with USN F/A-18 Hornets when an apparent engine problem happened. The pilot of N335AX headed for Monterey Regional Airport but apparently determined that he would not make the runway and ejected. ATAC operates a fleet of around a dozen of the Hunters, which are mainly single-seaters but there are also a couple two-seaters. The Hunter is an ideal aircraft for the air-to-air and air-to-surface aggressor roles.

ATAC has had at least nine incidents/accidents with the Hunter. Four of these have resulted in the loss of the aircraft and, unfortunately, two of the crashes claimed the lives of the pilots. It should be noted that the Hunter is operated in the United Kingdom by Hawker Hunter Aviation and the company provides similar services to the Ministry of Defense.

Oddly, N335AX was in the news earlier on 25 July 2025. On that date, a Southwest 737 had departed Burbank Airport and was at 14,400-ft when it had to make a "rapid drop" to 13,625-ft to "avoid a mid-air collision." At that time, several Hunters were in the area and N335AX was at approximately 14,653-ft undergoing "normal operations." The 737's collision avoidance system alerted the pilot and the drop of 475-ft was made. At their closest point, the two aircraft were 4.86 miles apart. The Hunter had departed El Paso, Texas, and was on its way to the West Coast. The 737 was heading to Las Vegas and both planes made normal landings.

(continued on page 70)

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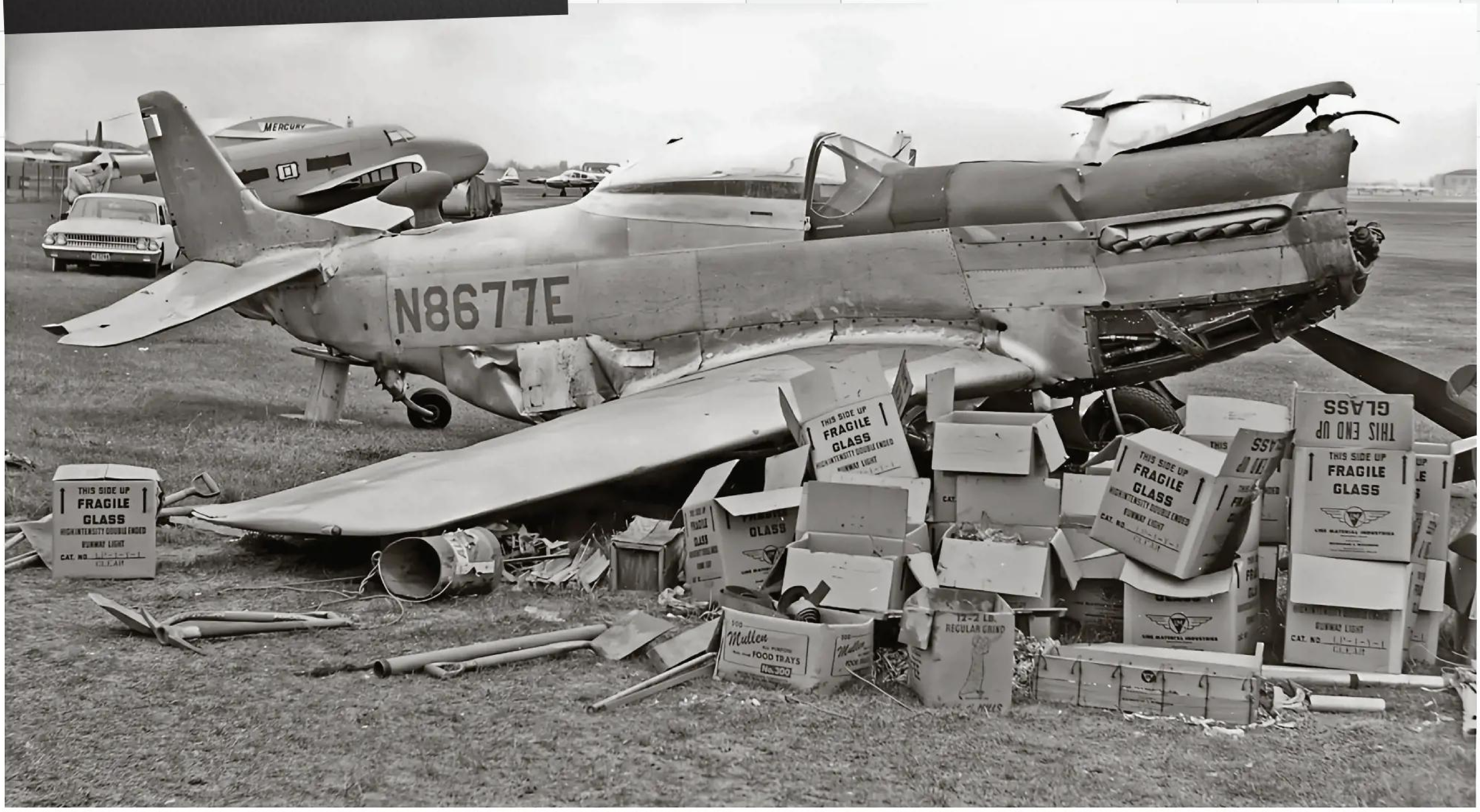
Lockheed 12 photo by Michael Malak Photography

## LOG ENTRIES

BY MARK BINGHAM

# THE HUNT THAT NEVER ENDS

### WARBIRD PARTS ARE OUT THERE — THEY ARE JUST BECOMING HARDER, AND MORE EXPENSIVE, TO FIND



**In the early days of the Warbird Movement, there were numerous accidents. However, the majority of aircraft were not junked but usually disassembled for parts. The value of a repaired aircraft did not correspond with the cost of repairs.**

As a Warbird owner, the most expensive investment clearly revolves around the purchase of the aircraft, but a close second comes when purchasing replacement and spare parts. The appreciating value of these finite resource items has caused a shift in the location of the sources for parts, but the mix remains interesting between individuals, businesses, and commercial enterprises. Knowledge of the sources can be critical in your search for such parts, and sometimes you may even need the help of a soothsayer to work through the labyrinth and secret world of Warbird parts.

Years ago, in a land far, far away, Warbird parts were relatively plentiful and inexpensive. Certain individuals became famous for their foresight in amassing serious collections of parts. Wilson "Connie" Edwards in Big Spring, Texas, starred as a pilot in the 1968 movie *Battle of Britain*. Rather than being paid in cash, Connie came up with a clever alternative and the movie producers gladly accepted his compensation request of surplus airplanes from the movie. Remember, these aircraft had very little value at the time and the producers did not know what to do with the planes once the filming was completed. A Supermarine Spitfire and Hispano HA.1112-M1L Buchons (the Spanish license-built version of the Messerschmitt Bf 109G) soon found their way from England to Texas and became the corpus of one of the world's largest collection of Warbirds and parts.

I had the opportunity visit Connie in April 2016 at his ranch and castle, as he started the process of divesting his fabulous collection of planes and parts. He was never interested in selling individual parts, probably because they were difficult to acquire, difficult to value, and were a constant distraction to his fleeting time. Connie's parts were only available in a package deal for the sale of an aircraft. The most famous deal was his astounding collection of Mustang parts that could only be acquired if you purchased his original, unrestored (EDITOR'S NOTE: This was unrestored in a sense for the Guatemalans had given the plane some updates over the years and then the P-51D was operated as a Warbird for several more years after being returned to the States) camouflaged Guatemalan Air Force Mustang. The selling price was $5 million for everything in 2016, and if you tried to negotiate a lower price, the selling price increased by half a million each time. Ultimately, Platinum Fighters brokered the sale to an unidentified purchaser, and that source of parts vanished as did Connie, who passed away on 3 May 2019. Eventually it was disclosed that a three-way deal was struck with Connie's wife in

September 2019 wherein a Caterpillar dealer in Indianapolis, Indiana, acquired the Guatemalan Mustang, Jay Wisler acquired all of the Mustang airframe parts, and Jack Roush acquired all of the 40+ Merlin engines, including a very rare Maytag-built Merlin. Roush Aviation also purchased the entire Merlin engine inventory of engine builder Jack Hovey during April 2025.

Don and Bill Whittington of southern Florida seemed to be everywhere in the 1970s and 1980s. Collecting Warbirds and parts, racing airplanes at Reno, racing cars, making movies, running truck stops, managing resorts — and going to jail. Their Warbird parts collection gravitated to Ft. Collins, Colorado, due to the fact it was business location of Darrell Skurich of early Warbird restoration fame. This parts collection was quite broad, but concentrated on P-51D and H models and included 25 Merlin engines (essentially complete cores). In 2015, this parts collection was initially going to be sold to a business venture between Mustang owner Michael Malcomb and Mustang restorer Dave Teeters of Airmotive Specialties Inc. in Salinas, California. Literally, as Teeters was ready to load up semi-trailers with the parts, the negotiated purchase deal fell apart, the trailers were not loaded and the parts were returned to the Ft. Collins hangar. Eventually, a new purchase deal was made with a Fixed Base Operator (FBO) owner in San Diego, California, for all of the parts, excluding the H model parts and the Merlin engines, which were trucked to Don Whittington's shop in southern Florida. The Merlin engines were eventually sold to Fagen Fighters. The status of the Warbird parts in San Diego remains a complete mystery.

Jay Wisler of Tampa, Florida, came into the Warbird parts scene in the early 1980s somewhat by accident, initially collecting airplane memorabilia, but he ended up creating a massive inventory of Warbird parts, particularly of the USAAF and Mustang flavor. For years, Jay was the primary source of all parts Warbird, but there never was an official listing or inventory of what he actually or potentially had. Jay kept his own inventory list of 84 pages divided into 23 categories. Eventually, his entire collection was acquired in late 2017 by Fagen Fighters in Granite Falls, Minnesota. Jay still is still active selling propellers and spinners.

**One of the true greats of the Warbird Movement — Wilson "Connie" Edwards during the filming of *Battle of Britain*.**

Brian O'Farrell of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, is a man shrouded in secrecy. O'Farrell became famous for his efforts of recovering and importing Mustangs from the Dominican Republic in 1984. These efforts were not one of Warbird love or infatuation, but rather strictly a quick return business proposition. O'Farrell is a self-deprecating private pilot of Cessna 172s, and he hasn't flown in years. However, over the past five decades he has collected a considerable volume of Warbird parts that is organized by manufacturer part number, no less. If you can ever obtain a communication into or from O'Farrell regarding a desired part, you will need to be prepared to pay top dollar.

Pioneer Aero Services of Chino, California, was the primary source of Mustang parts for years after Mustang owner Elmer Ward acquired the parts inventories and toolings of Gordon Plaskett of King City, California, who acquired some of the assets of Cavalier Aircraft Corporation after the death of David Lindsey. Gordon also traveled to Latin American and acquired more parts, airframes, and engines. He also purchased the parts of Marvin "Lefty" Gardner of Texas. Pioneer maintained a published inventory of Mustang parts, but no prices were ever listed because

**The Guatemalan Mustang and spares could be yours for $5 million. If you tried to negotiate, the price would go up another half-million for each negotiation. (Simon Brown)**

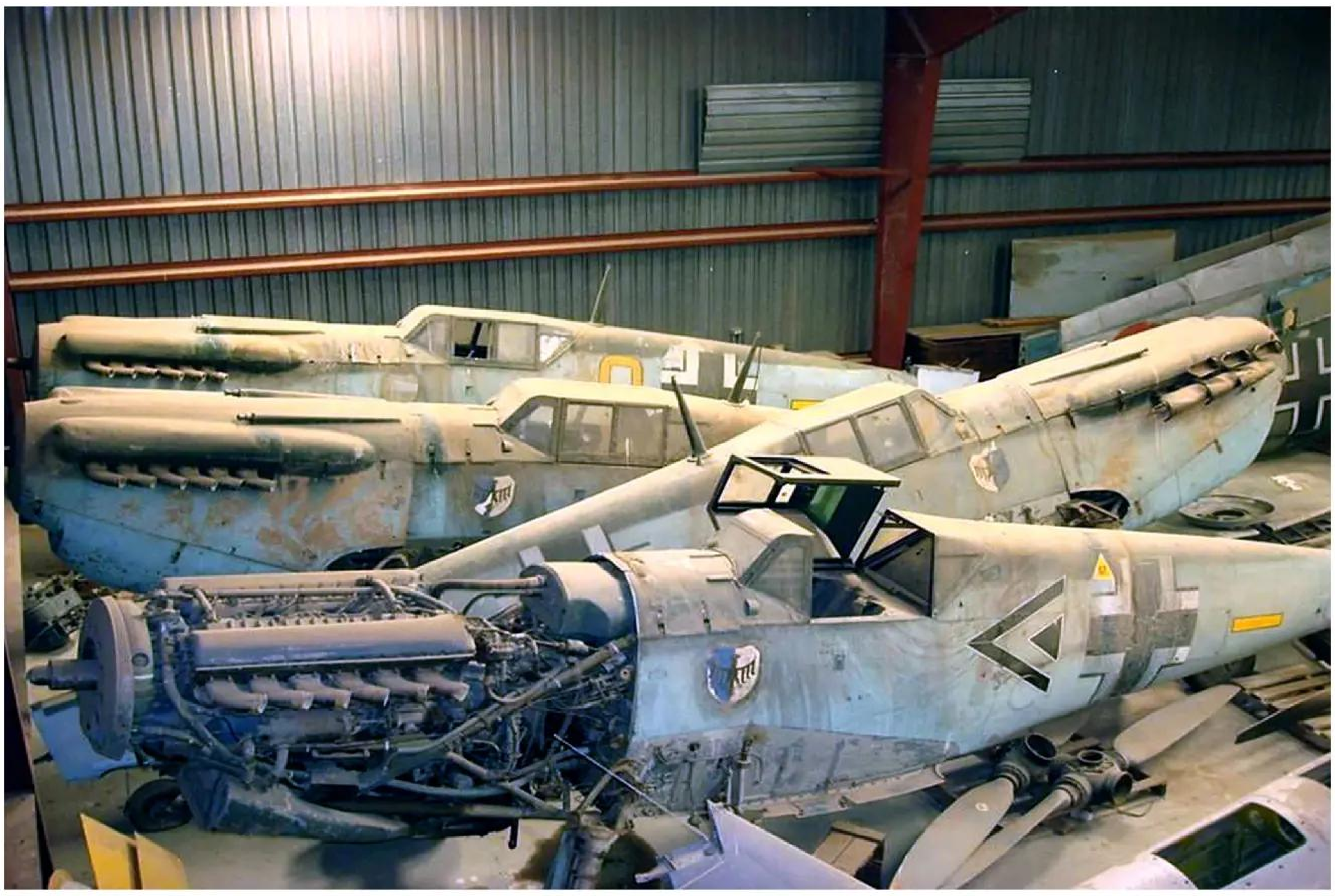
the prices were continually increasing as the finite resource was depleting. The ownership of Pioneer changed from Elmer Ward to his son Bret, and then ultimately their entire inventory was acquired by AirCorps Aviation in Bemidji, Minnesota in early 2023.

Other individuals became well-known as sources for Warbird parts because of their association with Warbirds. Glenn Wegman is a Warbird restorer in Indiantown, Florida; Pete Regina was a Warbird restorer in Van Nuys, California; Mike VadeBonCoeur is a Warbird restorer in Danville, Illinois; Odegaard Wings in Kindred, North Dakota is a sheet metal and wing fabricator; Tiger Destefani and other Reno air racers became sources for parts in Reno and eastern California, and various Chino Warbird businesses such as Carl Scholl of Aero Trader (which now specializes in B-25 parts and restorations) became staples for the parts industry. Some of these sources are essentially now all gone, as these parts have been picked over or sold to larger businesses.

The scarcity of these items along with the high and ever-increasing cost of parts has caused individual Warbird owners to horde parts. I am guilty as charged, but in remain good company because misery loves company and there is strength in numbers if we are all complicit. I confess to a lifetime supply of P-63 brake rotors and stators, a spare Merlin core, heads, and other miscellaneous parts. I am not alone and every Warbird owner I know has multiple shelves of spare parts, just in case. This is a problematic trend, because these parts are generally now out of circulation unless you happen to know of their existence.

So, where are all the Warbird parts today? The easy answer is the big two sources: AirCorps Aviation and Fagen Fighters. You will absolutely pay top dollar for parts from either, and if they don't have the part then they are generally capable of making that item for you. Sun Air Parts in Valencia, California, specializes in Pratt & Whitney piston engines, parts, engine accessory items, and propeller blades. Basler Turbo Conversions has the largest collection of DC-3/C-47 parts around. Regal Air Inc. in Ft. Collins, Colorado is a supplier of parts for fixed wing and rotary civilian, military, and commercial aircraft. Finally, if you can obtain an audience with Brian O'Farrell, he might have your desired part.

Now, we have to make a further note. Many parts sources for vintage aircraft were businesses that were individually owned. Most were started after the war by rugged individuals who bought the stuff for pennies on the dollar and then attempted to eke out a living through sales. You did not get rich at this type of business — you made a living. Over the past decade or so, time caught up with these people.



**The horde of ex-Spanish Air Force Hispanos. (Simon Brown)**

AIR VENT INC.

**Need a Merlin motor mount for a P-51?**

Sons and daughters had little to no interest getting their hands dirty with such stuff so the owners quietly retired. This meant massive quanities of parts and engines went to the scrapper — not so much for the Warbird fighters but certainly for all the big four-engine transports, C-47s, and C-46s. Within a couple years, mountains of these parts were, as they say, repurposed.

The internet has changed the world and the ability to search for Warbird parts. Ebay has become a platform for sellers of all things common and unusual, including random Warbird parts. Patience will be required because your need and your desired part may not converge at the same time. The old adage of "the time to buy an antique is when you find it" applies to Warbird parts. You may not need the part today, but you might tomorrow, so seize the day along with the part.

Another internet source for Warbird parts can be found within Facebook group pages. Each type of Warbird generally has one or more individual Facebook group pages to gather like-minded people. Some of these group pages prohibit any type of buying or selling, but they commonly refer you to a sister page specifically designed for marketing. You may need to broaden your focus in your search to include group pages such as Antique Aircraft Parts Exchange.

An unlikely path that you may want or need to pursue is to tap into the secret Warbird parts network. Every Warbird restoration shop has that one "squirrel" that knows where all the nuts are hidden. One of my personal favorites is Bill "Dude" Barclay of WestPac Restorations in Colorado Springs, Colorado. After decades in the industry, Dude definitely knows where all the nuts are hidden, and if he doesn't know, he knows everyone that does know. Dude can't negotiate the price, but he can make the introductions. He is just one of the faithful soldiers in a secret society, akin to the "Skull and Crossbones" and while you may never be admitted into their private sanctuaries, but you might be fortunate enough to receive a package in brown paper wrapping for enough dineros and future favors. Plus, The Dude is a great guy and anyone fortunate enough to meet with him will come away enriched — and not just with parts.

Happy hunting.

(*EDITOR'S NOTE:* There is another method of finding and acquiring parts and that is the individual expenditure of "shoe leather" while beating the bushes. Even though Mark pays homage to the individuals wealthy enough to have acquired large parts inventories, one must remember that supplies are still out there and waiting to be found. At the *Air Classics* office, one of my most maddening historical tasks is trying to quantify the spare parts acquired by the government to support the inventories of WWII fighters. This is an arcane study that involves delving through mountains of paperwork. It is a difficult search and one that is often completely unrewarding. The individual engaged in this task (me) must be willing to expend time and money. This is a search that (at least when it comes to the Lockheed P-38 Lightning) became a bit easier due to the fact that Lockheed disposed of a vast amount of vintage material when the company moved headquarters from Burbank to become closer to politicians in Washington — you know, those ethical individuals so vital in obtaining more increasingly expensive military contracts. Some

*(continued on page 94)*

Jim Larsen's dramatic photograph of the VF-101 F-14A tackling a Reno pylon.

# CAT ON THE COURSE!

*DURING THE 2000 RENO NATIONAL AIR RACES, A MOST UNIQUE EVENT TOOK PLACE. THOSE THAT STAYED LATE WERE ABLE TO WITNESS THE SIGHT OF A GRUMMAN F-14A TOMCAT ROARING AROUND THE RENO UNLIMITED PYLONS. WITH BOTH RENO AND THE TOMCAT NOW GONE, WE RECALL THAT MOST UNUSUAL FLIGHT*

## ARTICLE AND PAINTING BY STEVE COX

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM LARSEN**

After having attended about a half-dozen Reno National Air Races, I decided to head to Reno 2000 with a few preconceived ideas about what I would experience. However, one event would considerably raise my excitement level. Well before owning a smart phone, I thought I had budgeted the supply of 35mm film for my trusty Canon camera but by late Sunday afternoon I was out of film and my camera now had all the use of a small boat anchor. I wasn't too concerned because by friend Jim Larsen was always generous about sharing his top-quality photos and, as usual, Jim was on top of everything happening at the race.

Sunday afternoon brought about all the usual exciting expectations for the Gold races. Having seen several F-14 demonstrations at different venues, I was very excited to see another dynamic, thrilling, and LOUD display by that beast of a naval fighter. The airshow routine did not disappoint and it was as thrilling as ever.

I was intending to walk around the pit area for another look at the racers when the airshow announcer stated the F-14 demo crew would attempt a lap around the Unlimited course. Did the term Unlimited ever take on a new meaning that day!

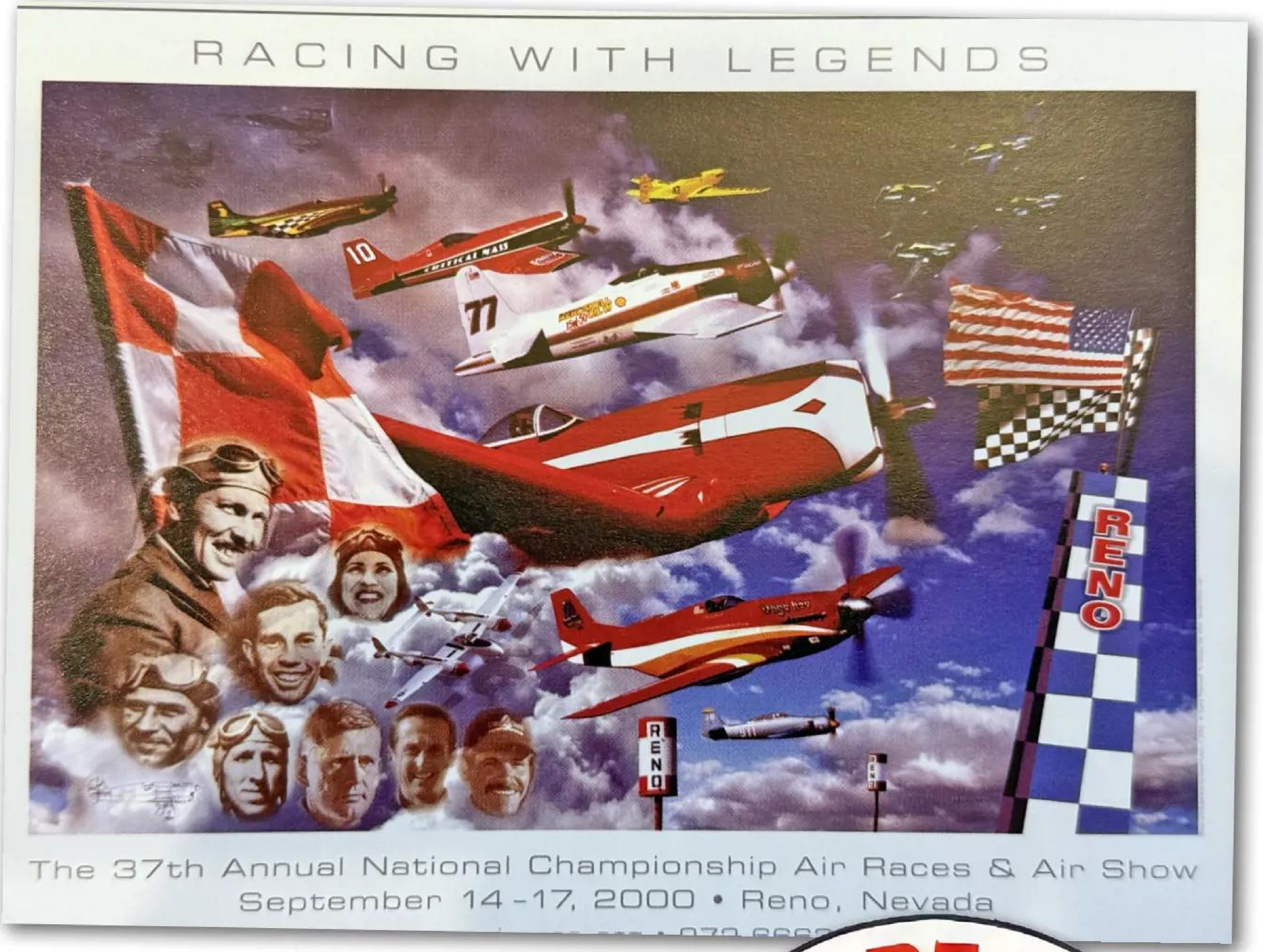
The crowd line was suddenly again packed as the Tomcat took off and headed to the course. That monster looked like it was on rails and seemed to fly most of the demo lap as low as if it had been Lefty Gardner in the cockpit. I knew those guys were punishing themselves with the high G banks. After being used to the roar of the Unlimiteds on the back side of the course, the sound of those massive turbofans echoing off the hills was just awesome.

As you can see, Jim was able to get some great shots. I had thought about doing a painting of the event for years, but somehow never pulled the trigger. Finally, I related the story to a friend and those exciting memories got the juices flowing again. Weirdly, in this age of the internet, there was not much about the event online. In fact, Jim and I had to do some thinking in order to recall the exact year of the Tomcat lap. Then, we realized it was the same year (2000) as the first jet exhibition race and Jim was able to pull more photos from the files.

I was now committed to do the painting you see on the next spread. I needed to find the crews that did the alternating demo flights. I was able to locate Mark Burgess after Tom Paulk (a member of the American Society of Aviation Artists and an ex-F-4 and F-14 RIO) was able to come up with a few possible leads. I then began exchanging emails with F-14 pilot Mark “Crunchy” Burgess and RIO Bill “Libby” Lind who had flown the Saturday show and remembered the weekend well.

It turns out that pilot Richard “Popeye” Doyle and RIO John “Roll” Keiser had flown the demo on Sunday with the F-14A from VF-101 “The Grim Reapers.” When asked to do a completely unplanned circuit of the course, they answered in the affirmative and air race — and Tomcat — history was made.

I decided to base my painting on Jim’s photos, which we think were near the beginning of the lap before they lit the burners and swept the wings. I felt that having the wings extended and the large heat plume from the turbofans at convey the size, mass, and energy of the Tomcat.


RACING WITH LEGENDS
10
77
RENO
The 37th Annual National Championship Air Races & Air Show
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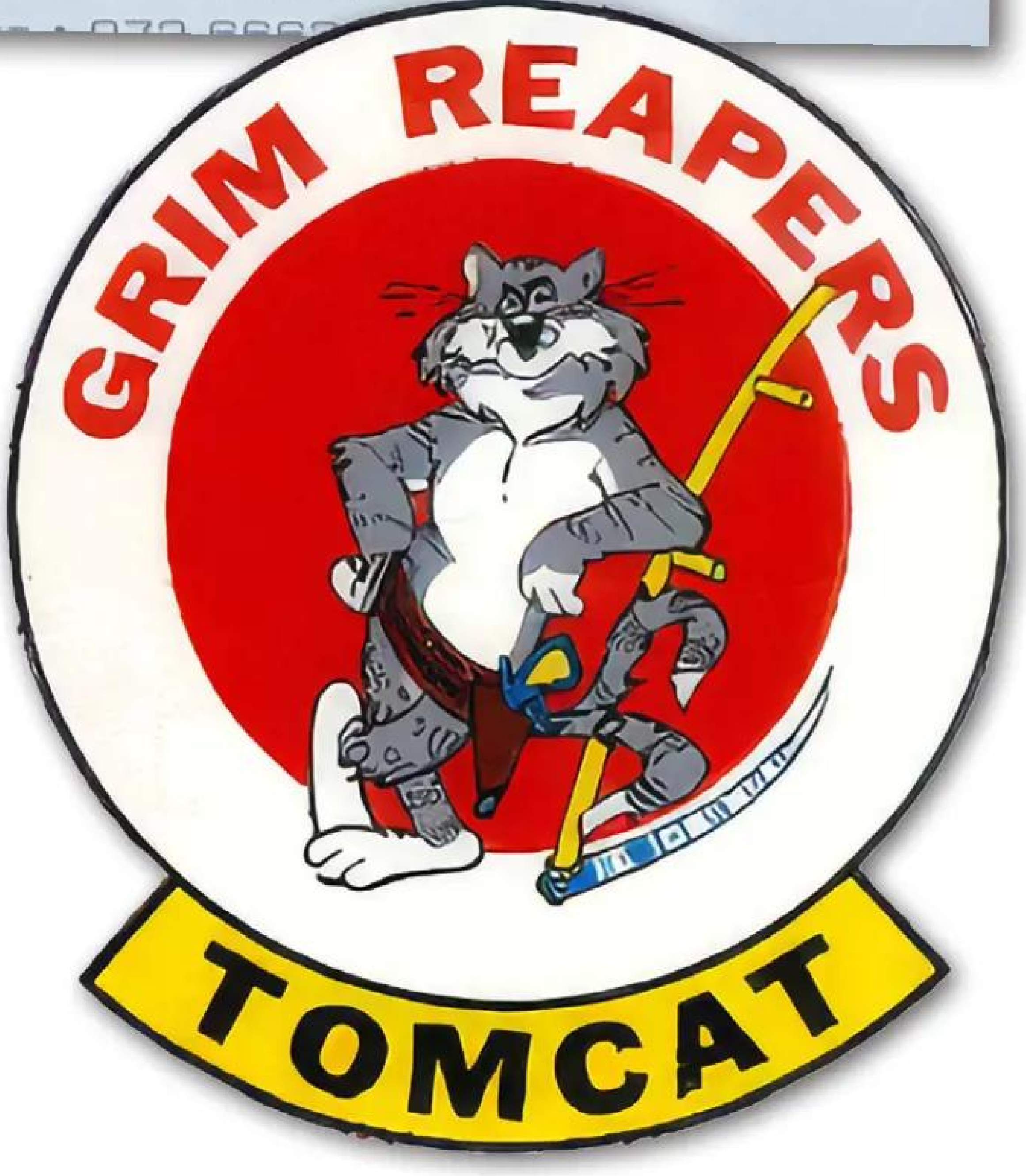
**The poster for Reno 2000.**

After getting a thumbs up from Mark on my proposal drawing, I got started on the painting. Of course, life happened and it was nearly a year before I could complete the painting. I asked Tom Paulk to critique the work for technical issues and subsequently made a few changes that saved me from what would have been some embarrassing reviews. Finally, I was able to present an image of which I was proud of to Mark and his fellow aviators.



**Flight jacket insignia for VF-101.**

John “Roll” Keiser took some time to describe the unique event: “The F-14 Demonstration Team was made up of two crews [four instructors] selected from the F-14 Training Squadron [RAG]. So, in addition to instructing new students in the Tomcat, the four of us would divvy up all the shows the Navy signed us up for around the country. We would fly out to them every weekend or so. I was a newish back seat instructor [RIO] and I think this was my first year getting to do the demo work. And somehow, I’d scored going to Reno with Popeye, who was pretty experienced.

“I was pumped. We had trained on the updated demonstration in the simulator and then live at El Centro for a week earlier in the year. The demo ran 20/25 minutes. It was a fast, high G, low altitude [targeting 200-feet above the ground] routine that burned an average of 11,000 to 12,000 pounds of fuel. [We carried 16,000 pounds without external tanks]. As a backseater, I was focused on feeding the pilot information needed to keep his eyes up and not looking down, maneuver order, airspeed/altitude callouts, in headings, out headings, pitch attitude, altitude checkpoints, etc.

“The demo started with a low transition off the runway at about ten feet in full afterburner [sometimes lower], hit about 300/400 knots [well past the runway], and a 6.5G pull vertical into the show-left corner to start the demo.

“From that point, it did not stop — 20 minutes of afterburner and high

**OVERLEAF:** **Steve Cox’s masterful painting of Popeye and Roll preparing to enter the Reno Unlimited race course.**

60
AD
NAVY
INTAKE
DANGER
Steve Cox © ASAA

RENO
160
RESCUE

Wings extended, the Tomcat pulls 6+Gs rounding a pylon.

G horizontal and vertical pullouts, setting off car alarms and occasionally blowing out building windows when we got close to breaking the sound barrier [shooting for Mach .95 at a couple points in the routine].

"By the end of the demo, we'd be out of fuel, out of breath, and a sweaty mess. Especially considering that we might have been up late the night before in the dedicated performance of our public relations duties at airshow events [partying].

"There was part of the demo after the clean double Immelmann, where the airshow announcer would call us over the radio and the RIO would talk to the crowd. Even at this point in the show, I recall having to catch my breath enough to talk. Frank Kingston Smith was the announcer in 2000 and he was always fun to work with. His catchprase was that he was 'One Fine Announcer' and Popeye would always call him 'One DAMN Fine Announcer' and yell the D word whenever we were hanging out.

"We had the routine timed to a soundtrack that started with a track from Glory during the intro, "Mission Impossible" as we took off, and then moved into Creed, Fatboy Slim, and others. We'd find the sound guys at the shows and bribe them with patches and/or beer to play it at max volume, no matter what they were told by the show organizers. At Reno, I had forgotten the tape at home so I had gone into town, bought a boom box and the appropriate CDs, and recorded another one. True dedication.

"Reno was a different type of event in that the actual airshow was basically a filler for the main event of all the racing, which ran all day. So, we flew our show and the crowd response was something like you'd expect from everybody during intermission, getting beer, or going to the bathroom. At other shows either before or after our demonstration, we'd do other things. Some shows we'd join up with civilian-owned and operated WWII Warbirds for Heritage fly-bys. Other times, we'd set up and race a jet truck, which was always fun for us.

"These and all the other events were briefed well in advance so we were surprised after we finished our Reno display when Frank Kingston Smith got on the radio to us [transmitting to the crowd as well] and asked if we would like to take a lap around the course.

"This had not been briefed or mentioned to us even as a possibility. I can't remember what our fuel state was exactly, but I recall it wasn't a lot. Plus, we hadn't really studied the exact layout of the pylons other than in passing. Popeye and I had a short discussion and pretty quickly decided 'f**k yeah, we'll do it!'

"At the start of the lap, we were later told that the crowd really perked up and began to take notice. I remember we started pretty conservative, just trying to pick up the pylon and get a feel for the track — maybe at about 350 knots. I think the rules for flying a lap were that the highest you could be was 250 feet above the ground. If you went above that figure, the lap wouldn't count.

"Popeye was working us low. As we went toward the back side of the track, I felt the afterburner kick in [which feels like a bump in the seat for each of its five stages] and this led us into more and more acceleration, increasing G, and the pylons started whipping by.

"After we landed, it was related to me that at this point the crowd was fully into it. On their feet, spilling bear, and cheering the mighty Tomcat's planform on the opposite side of the track and in full afterburner as we raged around the Reno course at what must have been in excess of 500 knots. I couldn't tell you exactly how fast we were going because at this point, I was fully looking outside, doing my full 'hook' strain to keep from graying out from the Gs we were pulling.

"At the start, we had been chatting about where the pylons were but now we were under heavy G and they were coming by too fast to react. Towards the backside I remember Popeye saying 'I lost the cones.' All I could get out was 'just keep pulling!'

"The last turn on the track, right in front of the grandstands, was more like a 90-degree turn than a circle. I recall heading right towards the grandstands already under 6+Gs, well over 500 knots, and thought 'oh boy, is this going to hurt.'

"Popeye squared the last corner with a crushing pull that took everything out of me. Frank came on the radio and said our time was just barely slower than the F-16 that had apparently flown the course earlier. I tried to think of a witty comeback but I'm not sure that I got anything out. I was totally out of breath. Popping the mask off, wiping sweat, catching my breath, wings coming back, gear down right into the landing with the fuel low lights on. Epic!"

I'm thrilled to have taken part in telling the story of an important and exciting part of naval aviation and Reno air race history. It's not often an aviation artist gets to portray a story like this from the first — albeit spectator — perspective. **AC**

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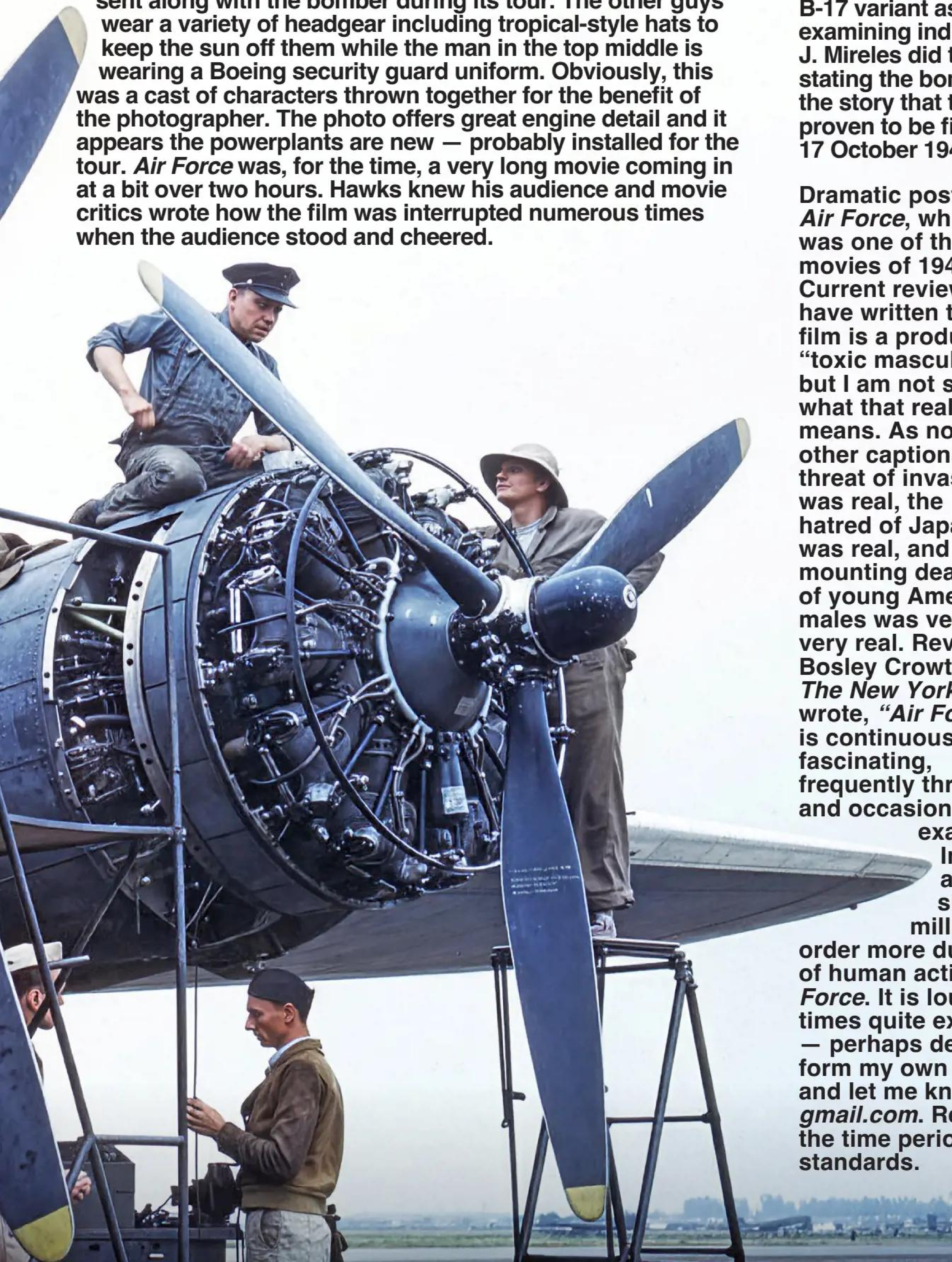
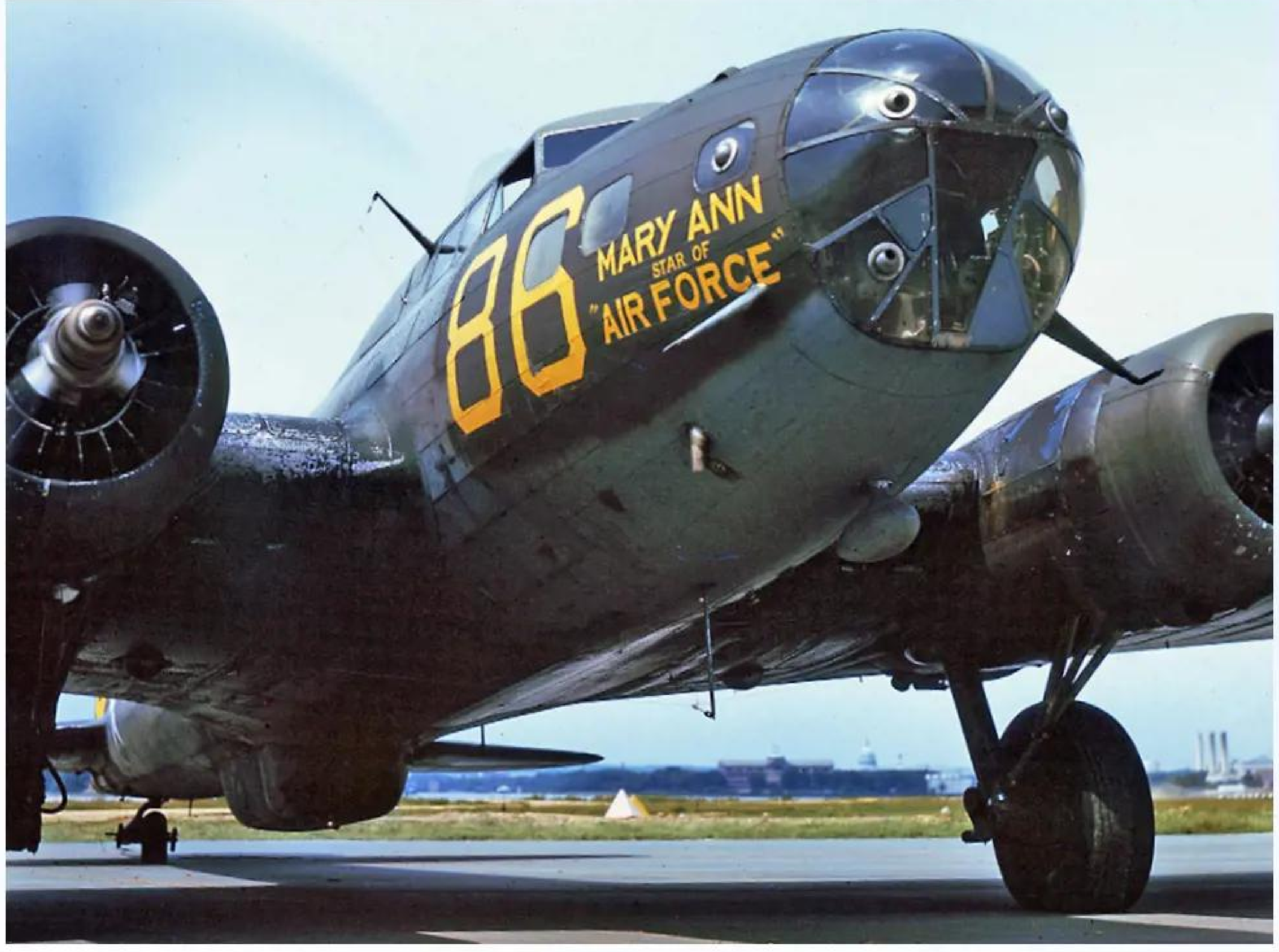
# COLORS OF WAR

*IN THIS INSTALLMENT, WE DEPART A BIT FROM OUR NORMAL FORMAT TO PRESENT A COLLECTION OF COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS OF B-17 FLYING FORTRESSES FLOWN BY A NUMBER OF USAAF UNITS IN THE ETO*

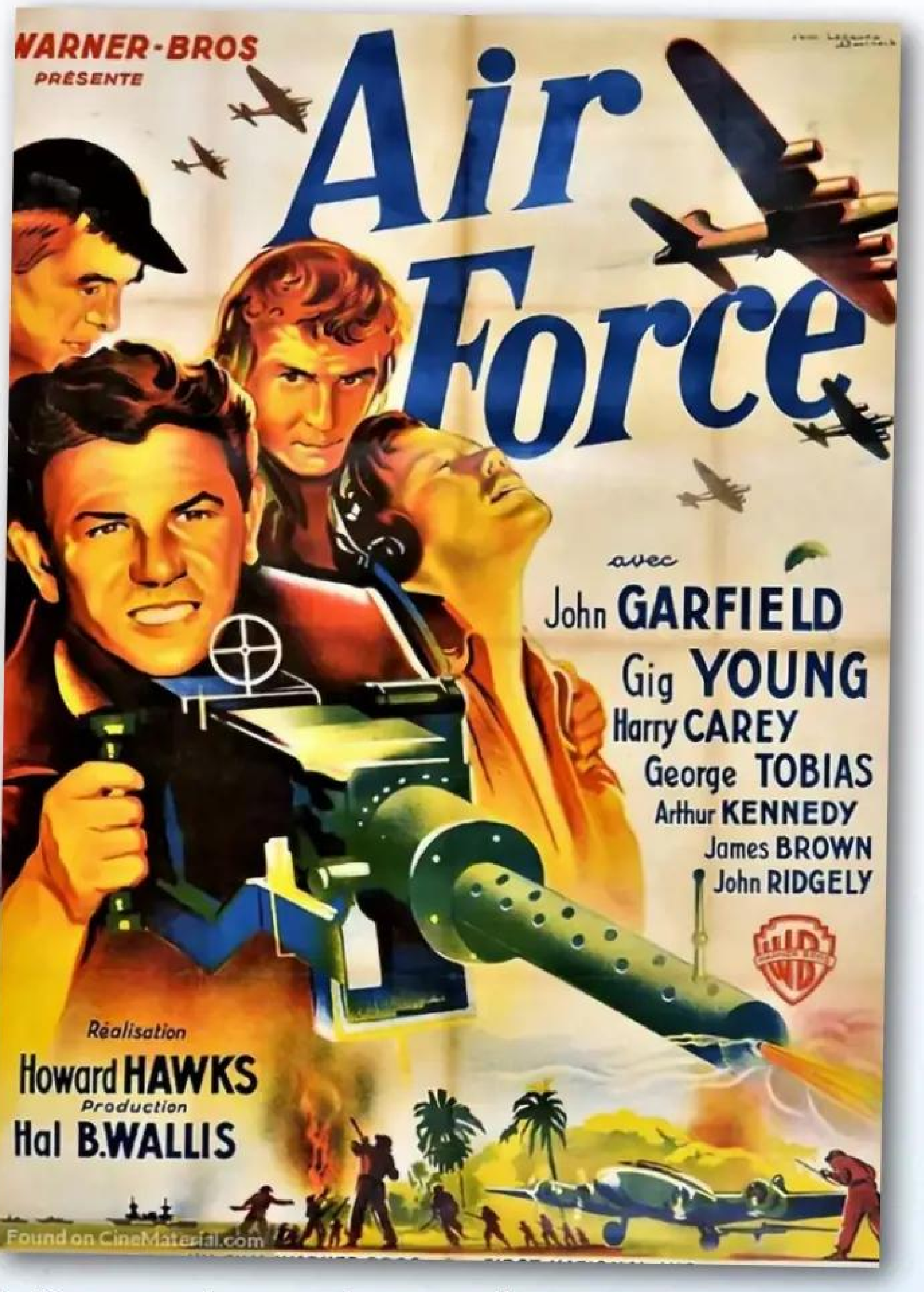
**BY MICHAEL O'LEARY**

**In past installments of "Colors of War," we have run a few shots of Boeing B-17E *Mary Ann* that was the star of the 1943 film *Air Force*. The plot of the film revolves around the crew of *Mary Ann* and how they set out from Hamilton Field near San Francisco only to arrive during the middle of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The film was rushed to completion and came out on 20 March 1943 so it could serve an audience desperate for any view of American forces winning against the enemy. The film did just that and it was wildly popular. Director Howard Hawks considered the movie as his major contribution to the war effort. *Air Force* would go on to become a masterpiece of WWII movies created while the war was still being fought and completed when the outcome was anything but certain. Hawks knew he had to fictionalize some of the events in the movie but he did a better job than most modern movies about WWII. The film shows just how unprepared this country was for the Pacific War as the enemy swept through the Philippines, Pearl Harbor, and Wake Island. We must remember that many American citizens were living with the real fear of the Japanese attacking and invading the West Coast. Today, most people probably just view this as another war movie but that fear of invasion permeated a major part of America. Of course, *Mary Ann* and her crew are on hand to take part in many of the battles and there is some really good cinematography of the Fort and other aircraft (much of the filming was done at Drew Field in Florida). Going through our files, we found a few more Kodachromes of *Mary Ann* while the bomber was on a War Bond tour. These images were taken by USAAF PR photographers who were responsible for portraying the war in a "patriotic" manner. In this shot, maintenance is being performed on the bomber's Wright R-1820-97 engines to make sure the plane was up and running for its lengthy tour across the country. It is interesting to note the different style of clothing — the fellow on the left is wearing a rather snazzy civilian outfit and he was probably a Boeing field representative sent along with the bomber during its tour. The other guys wear a variety of headgear including tropical-style hats to keep the sun off them while the man in the top middle is wearing a Boeing security guard uniform. Obviously, this was a cast of characters thrown together for the benefit of the photographer. The photo offers great engine detail and it appears the powerplants are new — probably installed for the tour. *Air Force* was, for the time, a very long movie coming in at a bit over two hours. Hawks knew his audience and movie critics wrote how the film was interrupted numerous times when the audience stood and cheered.**

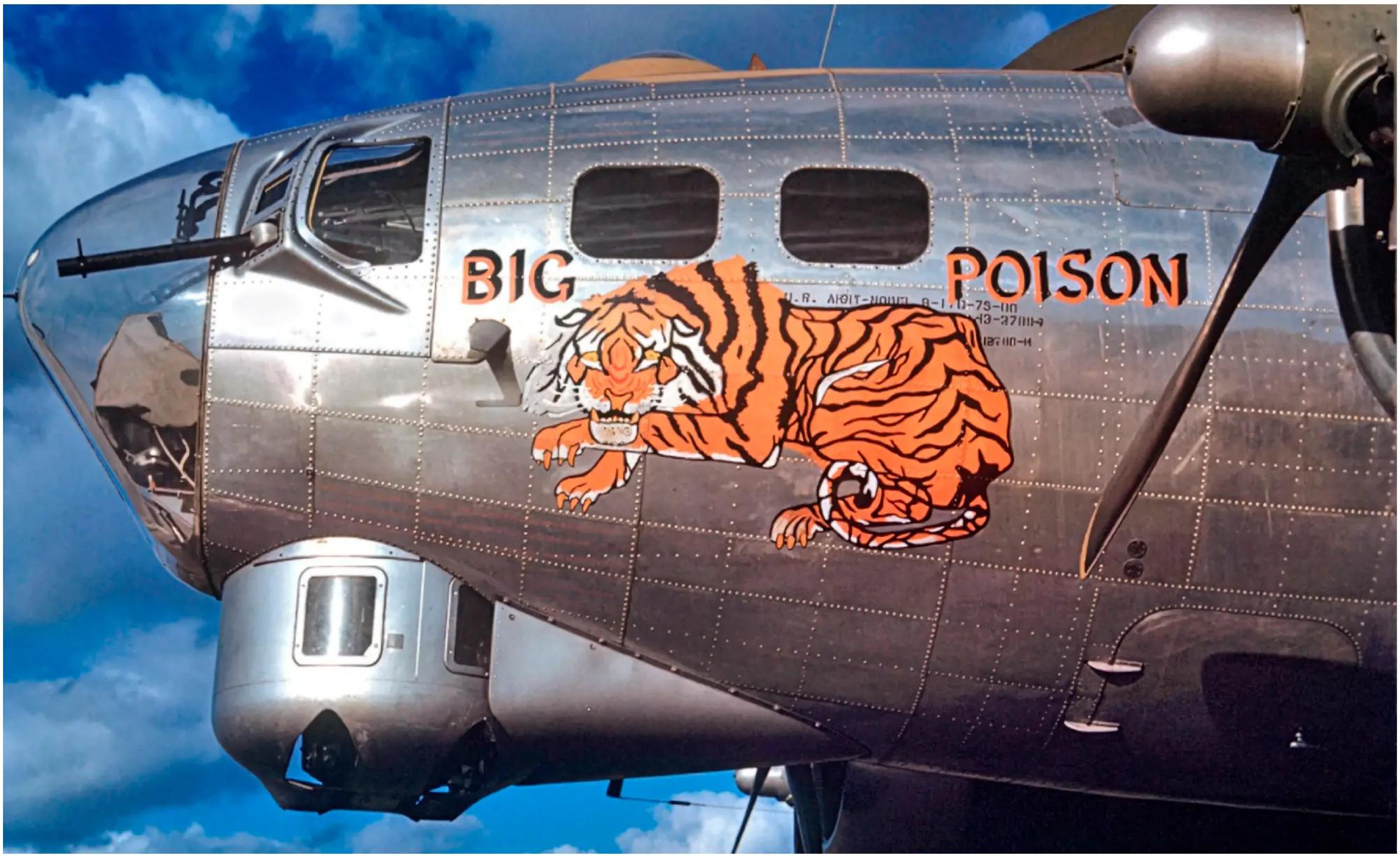




**Cowls back on, the Wrights are run-up prior to the Fort departing for the next stage of its nation-wide tour. As can be seen, the wording *MARY ANN — STAR OF "AIR FORCE"* was added to the nose in Insignia Yellow paint. At each airfield where the bomber stopped, visitors could make a War Bond donation and tour the aircraft. This view shows the swivel mounts for the machine guns to advantage. It also appears that the Fort was given a new coat of paint. Over the years, there has been some speculation between aviation enthusiasts about the "exact" aircraft that portrayed *Mary Ann*. We went to B-17 expert Scott Thompson to get his thoughts. After watching the film several times, Scott concluded that the Fort known as *Mary Ann* is actually a modified B-17B rather than a B-17C or later B-17 variant as others have claimed. By stopping the film and examining individual frames, Scott (aviation historian Anthony J. Mireles did the same thing) offers a convincing argument stating the bomber is B-17B USAAC 38-584. Over the years, the story that the aircraft was sent into combat and lost has proven to be fiction. The bomber was written off in a crash on 17 October 1943.**

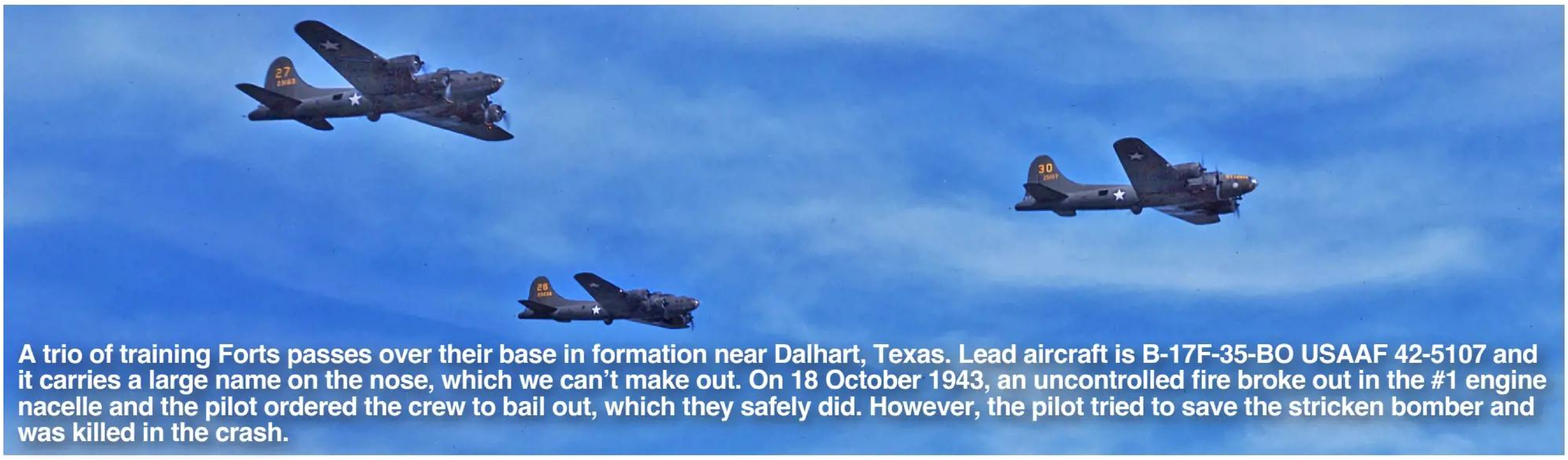


**Dramatic poster for *Air Force*, which was one of the top movies of 1943. Current reviewers have written that the film is a product of "toxic masculinity" but I am not sure what that really means. As noted in other captions, the threat of invasion was real, the hatred of Japanese was real, and the mounting death toll of young American males was very, very real. Reviewer Bosley Crowther for *The New York Times* wrote, *"Air Force… is continuously fascinating, frequently thrilling and occasionally exalting."* In *The Nation*, reviewer James Agee gave a rather strange opinion. "The well-paid shamming of forms of violence and death which millions a day are meeting in fact seems of an order more dubious than the shamming of all other forms of human activity; so I cannot be sure how I feel about *Air Force*. It is loud, loose, sincere, violently masculine, and at times quite exciting." I have not watched *Air Force* in years — perhaps decades — but I now intend to do so in order to form my own opinion. I would invite readers to do the same and let me know your thoughts at *moleary2challenge@gmail.com*. Remember, we must consider the film during the time period in which it was made… and not by today's standards.**

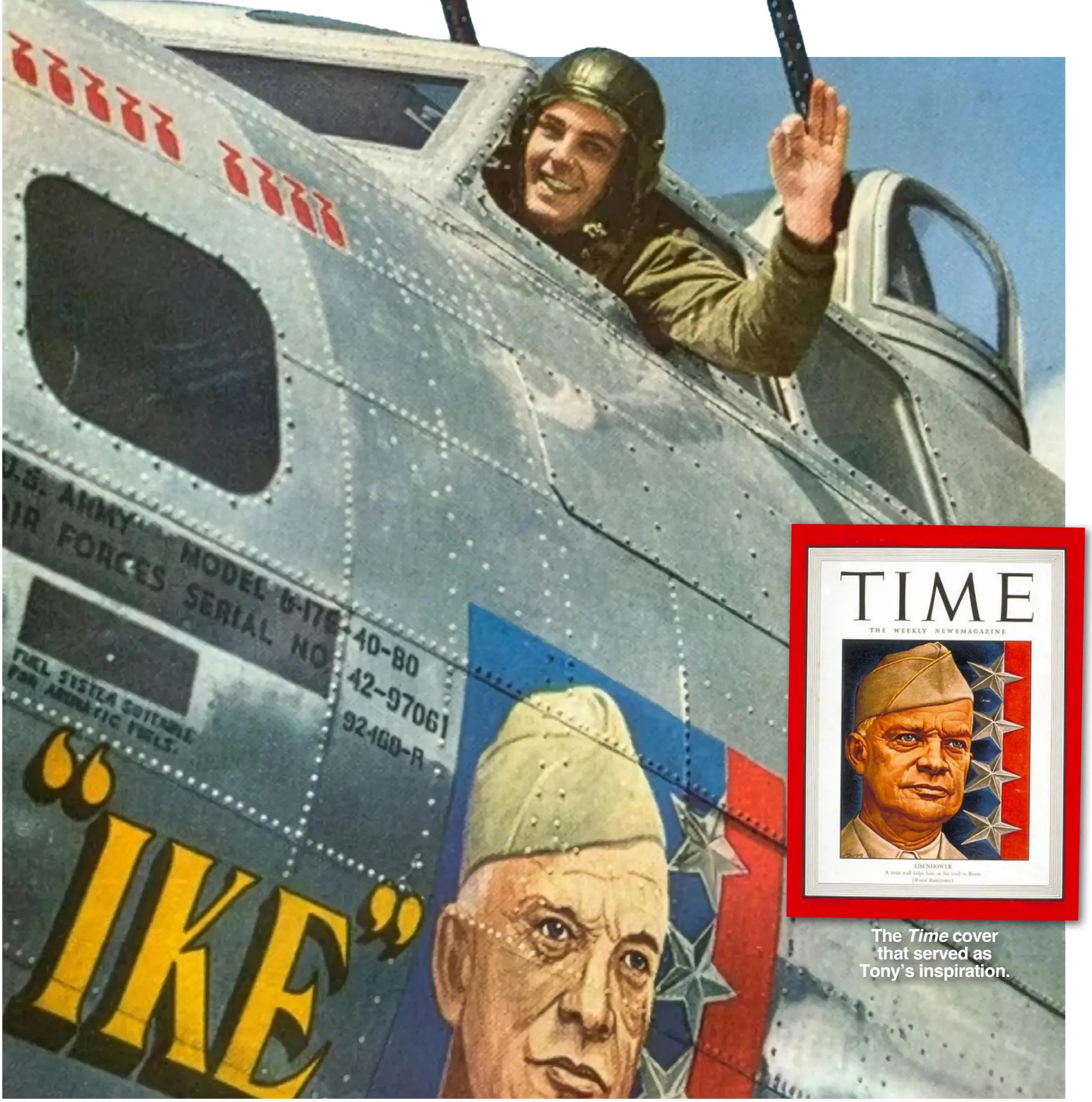


**Beautifully rendered nose art on the gleaming aluminum of B-17G-76-BO USAAF 43-378094. *Big Poison* was assigned to the 849th Bomb Squadron, 490th Bomb Group, on 1 July 1944. With massive numbers of bombers forming in the sky over England for raids on Germany, mid-air collisions were uppermost in the minds of most crewmen. On 15 May 1945, *Big Poison* collided with *Miss Fortune* 43-37806. The crews managed to bail out of the stricken aircraft but the blazing wreckage came down at Prickwillow in Suffolk, killing two civilians and injuring three others.**

**Somewhere in Texas, the trainee crew for a Flying Fortress prepares to board their aircraft. The Forts utilized for training rarely carried any distinctive personal markings and this aircraft was basically Olive Drab/Neutral Gray.**

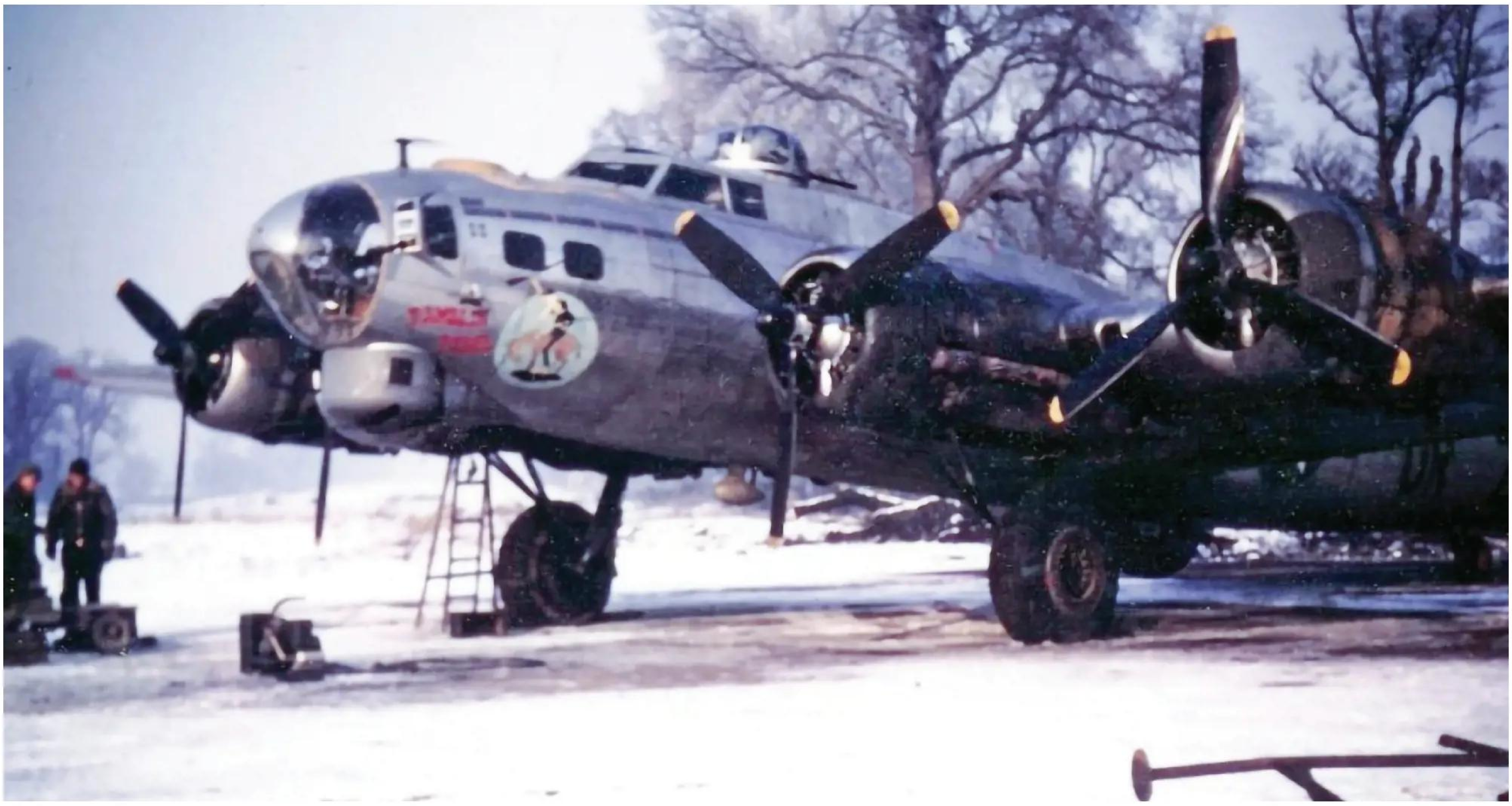


**A trio of training Forts passes over their base in formation near Dalhart, Texas. Lead aircraft is B-17F-35-BO USAAF 42-5107 and it carries a large name on the nose, which we can't make out. On 18 October 1943, an uncontrolled fire broke out in the #1 engine nacelle and the pilot ordered the crew to bail out, which they safely did. However, the pilot tried to save the stricken bomber and was killed in the crash.**

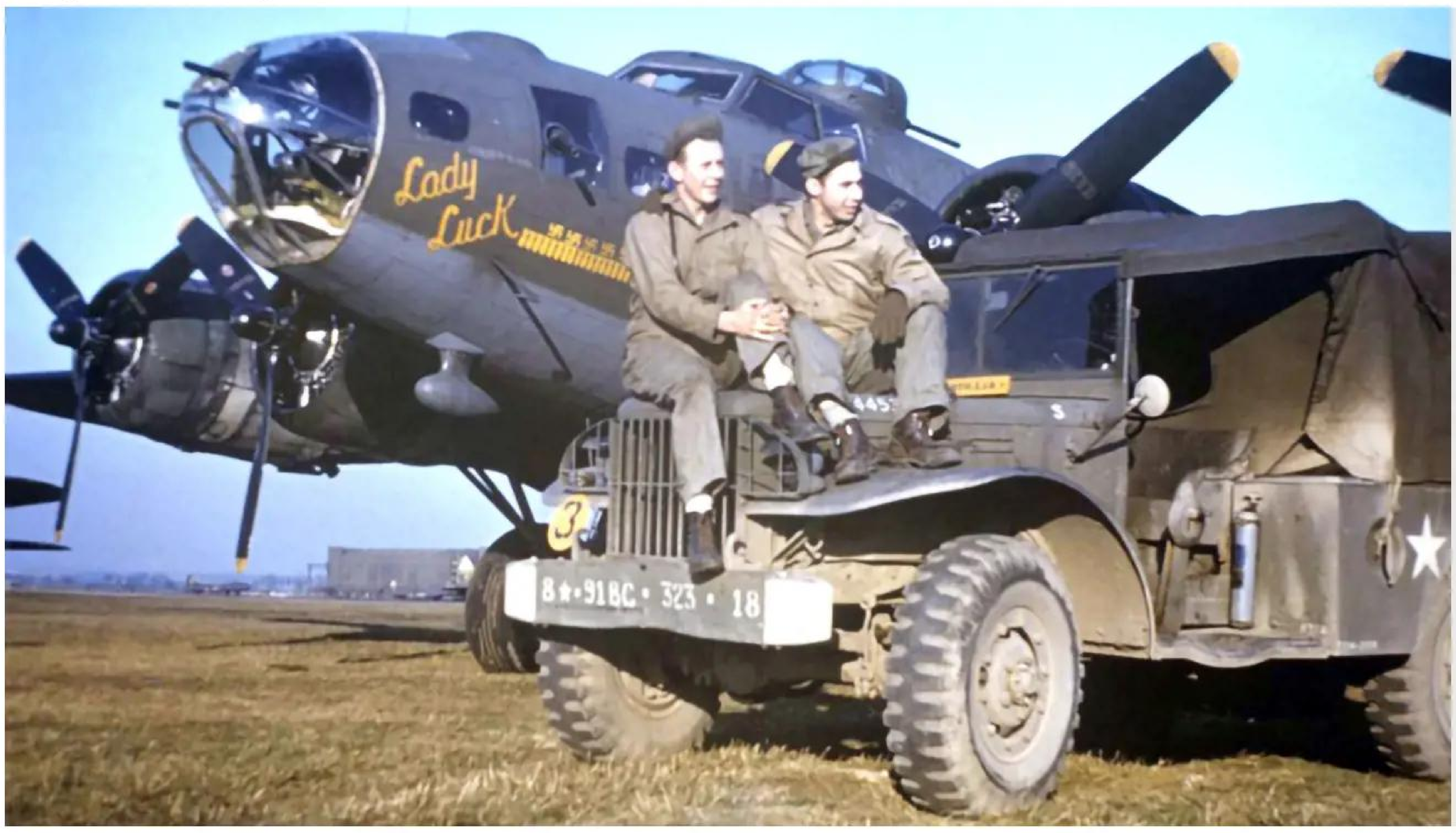


The *Time* cover that served as Tony’s inspiration.

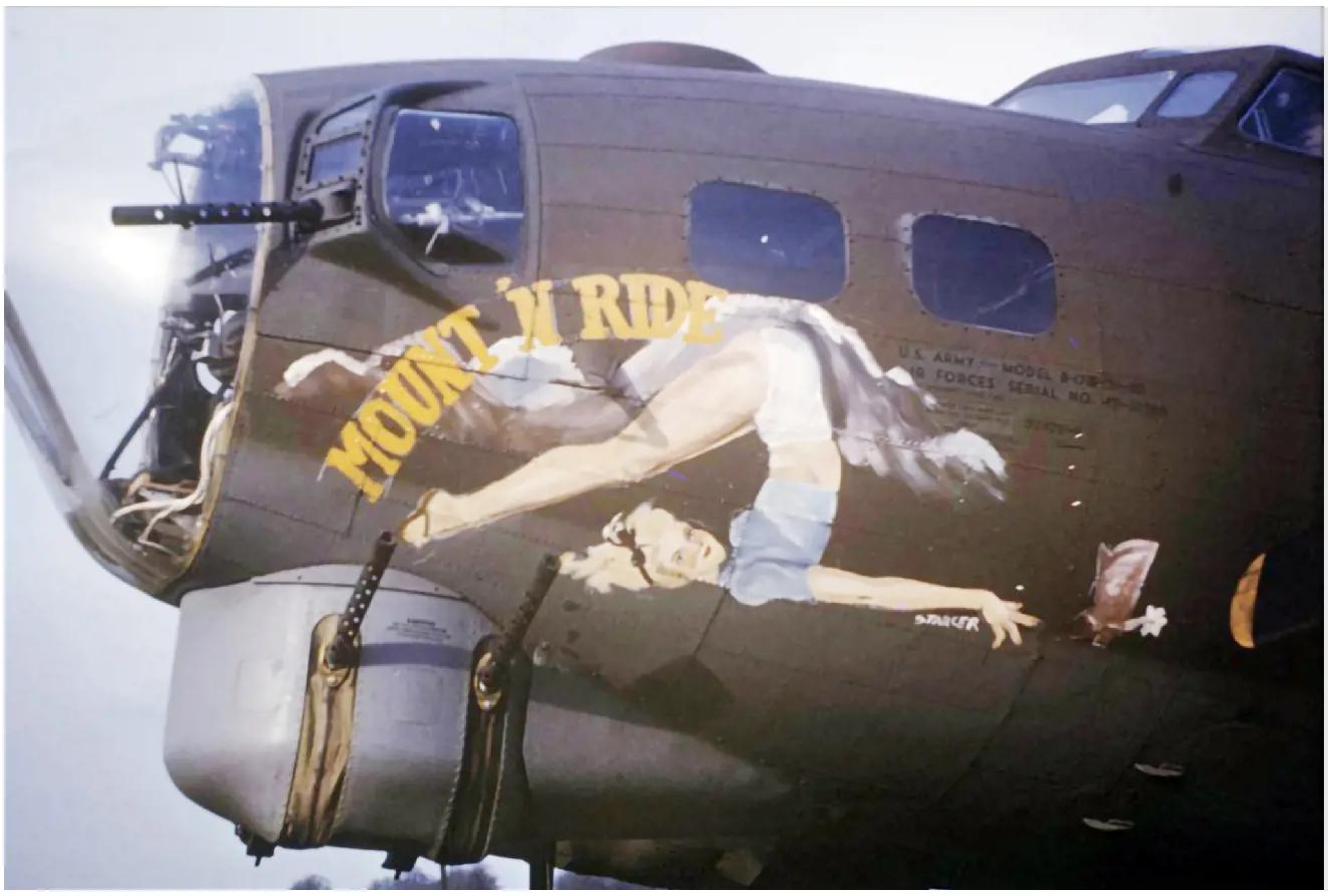
One of the greatest USAAF nose artists of WWII was Cpl. Tony L. Starcer of the 91st Bomb Group. I got to know Tony toward the end of his life. He was a super person — full of energy and extremely proud of the work he had done during the war. I often wonder what the German and Japanese fighter pilots thought when they saw fleets of American bombers heading toward them — almost each aircraft emblazoned with colorful art that showcased the determination of the Americans in destroying the enemy. To the attacking fighter pilots, did the nose art highlight the freedom of expression enjoyed by average Americans but suppressed in their own countries? It must have been disconcerting to say the least, for the enemy knew that these men would not turn back from their assigned missions. A USAAF photographer wanted to send a shot of B-17G-40-BO USAAF 42-97061 from the 232rd BS, 91st BG, to the newspapers and magazines “back home.” Tony did over 130 pieces of nose art during his time in the USAAF and *“IKE”* was one of his favorites. “I often used photos from magazines and newspapers to create my art,” said Tony as we sat in the shade provided by the left wing of the Curtiss C-46 Commando belonging to the Commemorative Air Force at Camarillo, California. Tony had done the nose art for the C-46 named *China Doll* and you could tell how important this was to Tony. “By 1980, I thought that the new generation had forgot about us ‘old guys’ but then something happened. The interest in WWII greatly increased and I began receiving letters from young people who admired my nose art and wanted to thank me for what I had done. All I did was paint the art, the boys that took the planes to Europe are the ones that deserve the recognition.” Tony, very ill at the time, had to stop and wipe the tears that were freely flowing as his mind traveled back to an airfield in England as young men encumbered by all their flight gear began crawling into the B-17s, strapping in, and starting up the engines. You could tell that it seemed like it was happening yesterday to Tony. “So many did not come back. When they returned, I watched them taxi back to their parking spots. There were many, many empty areas.” He could not carry on and the people listening to Tony put their arms around his now frail shoulders as he sat in a wheelchair. He would be gone a few months later. The inspiration for *GENERAL “IKE”* came from the cover of the 13 September 1943 issue of *TIME* magazine featuring a painting of Gen. Eisenhower. The painting was done by Russian-born American artist Boris Artzybasheff — an extremely popular artist of the time. Eisenhower formally dedicated the bomber during April 1944 with a bottle of water from the Mississippi River. *GENERAL “IKE”* received heavy battle damage on a number of occasions but always made it back home and she became known as a “lucky” bomber. The Fort survived the war and was flown back to the States during October 1945. *GENERAL “IKE”* and thousands of similar combat veterans with colorful nose art and historic records were scrapped without a thought of preservation. As a point of interest, the USAAF PR team could not find the pilot so crew chief M/Sgt McDaniels, who was responsible for the care and feeding of the bomber, was placed in the pilot’s seat.



**B-17G 43-37540 *Ramblin' Rebel* of the 323rd Bomb Squadron, 91st Bomb Group, is prepared for a mission during a freezing January 1945 day in England. The Fort would fly over 100 missions and then took part in the POW return flights. It was scrapped at Kingman during December 1945.**

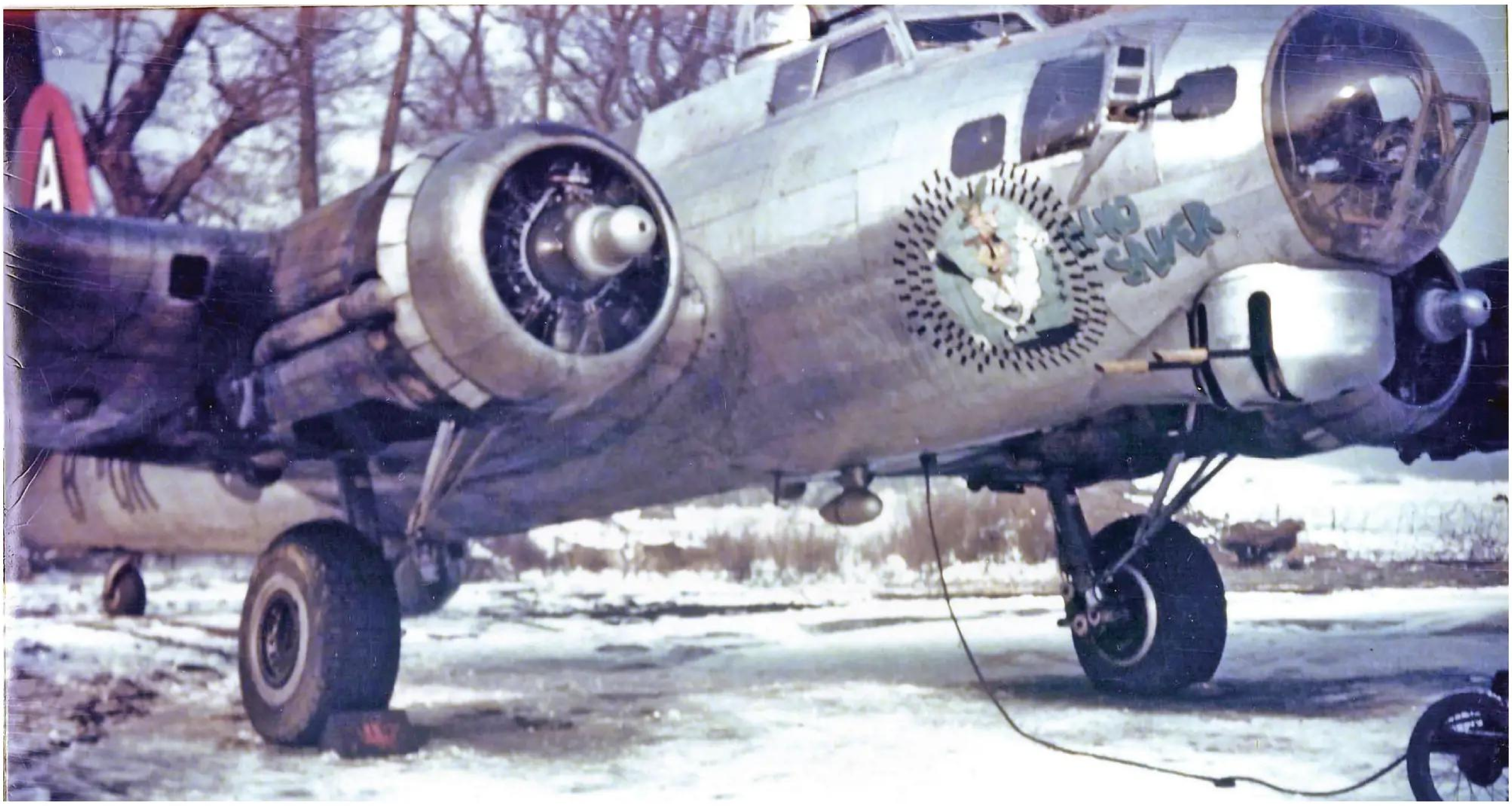


**Crewmen sit on a Dodge WC51 weapons carrier with B-17F-75-BO 42-29837 *Lady Luck* of the 324th BS, 91st BG, in the background. The bomber was later transferred to the Mediterranean theater and survived the war and was flown back to the States but was scrapped at Searcey Field.**

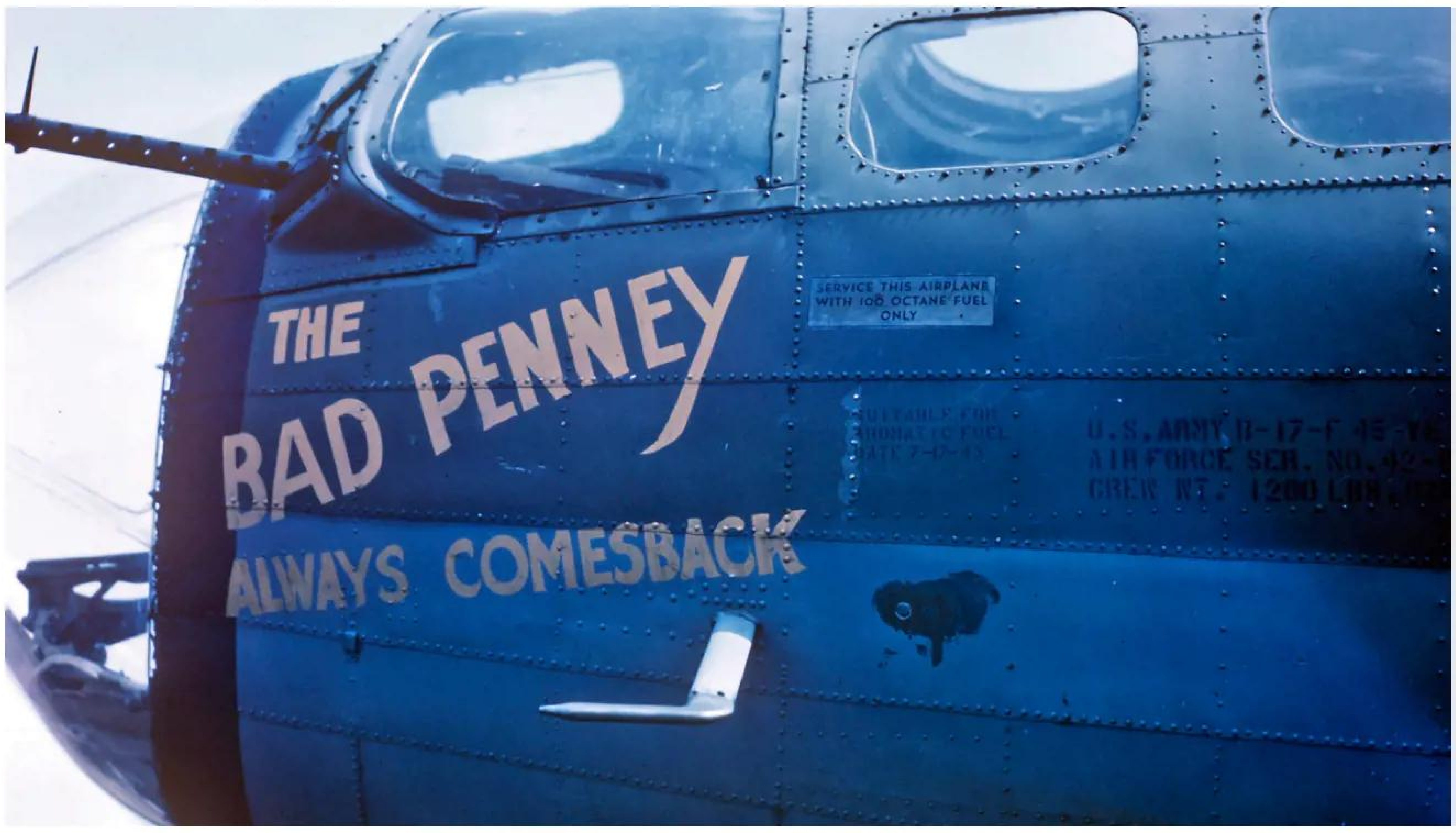


***MOUNT 'N RIDE* was another Tony Starcer art work and it was inspired by an Alberto Vargas painting printed in *Esquire* magazines. All the crews loved the Vargas paintings of beautiful women and these images found their way onto the noses of the bombers and the backs of the A-2 jackets. B-17G-20-20 42-31585 was damaged on a mission to the Augsburg Messerschmitt plant on 16 March 1944. With the two outboard engines knocked out by anti-aircraft fire, the plane landed in Dubendorf, Switzerland, where it — and the crew — were interned.**

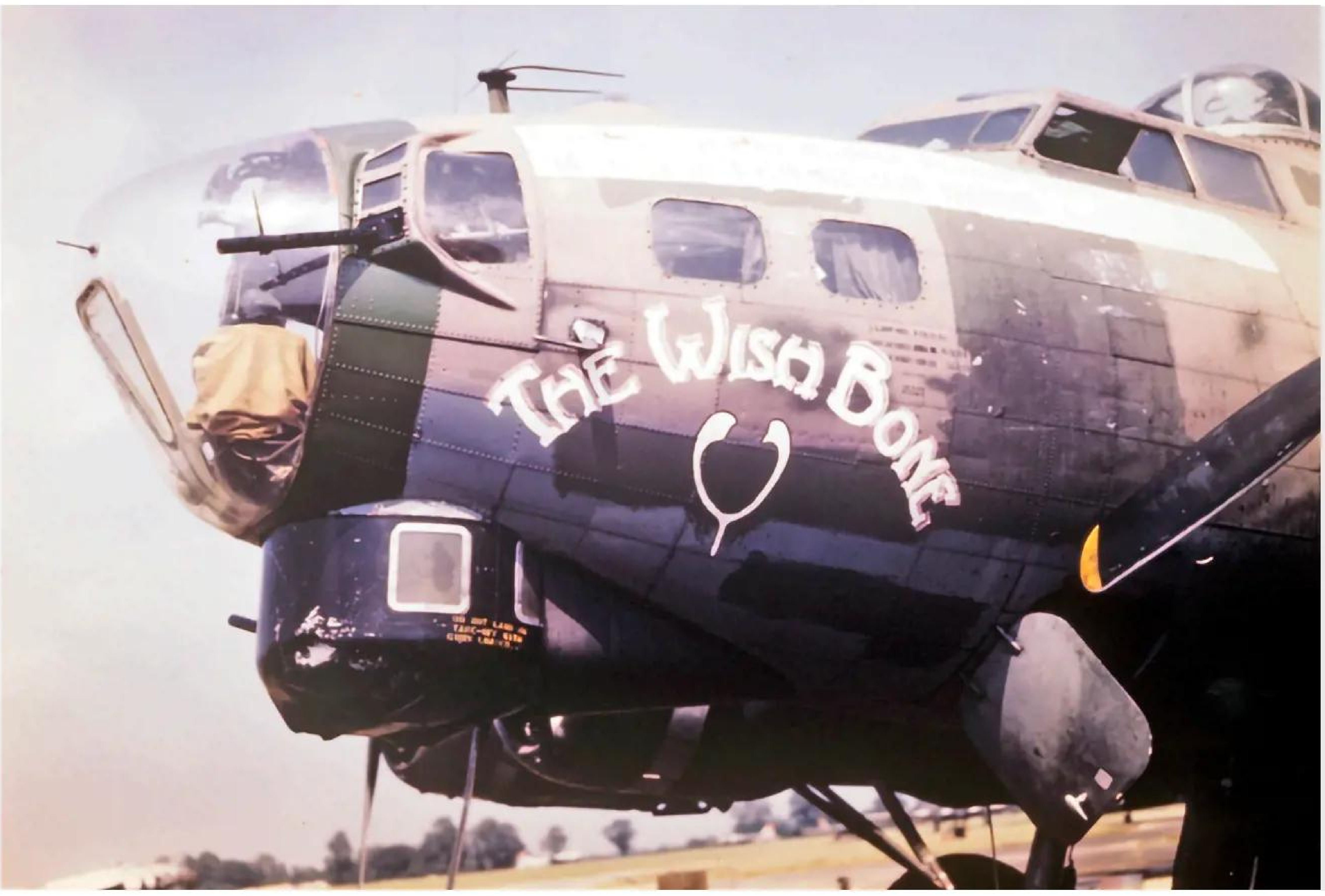
Two crewmen from B-17G 43-37552/LL*E *Peacemaker* of the 401st BS, 91st BG, examine the damage caused by an attacking Fw 190 back at their Bassingbourn base. Their luck ran out on 12 April 1945 when *Peacemaker* was up for a test flight following maintenance. The Fort crashed, for unknown reasons, near Weston in Hertfordshire. All six aboard were killed including the crew chief who had come along to see how the repairs were functioning. The nose art on this aircraft was painted by Tony Starcer. Tony would also paint the backs of the leather A-2 jackets worn by the bomber crews. He would later recall the over 200 jackets he painted: “There was a ten-man crew in the B-17 and after completing the nose art painting, most of the crew requested the same art on their A-2s. As I completed each A-2, I would stack each jacket on top of the next beside my bed and waited for the crews to collect them. The pile soon grew to a height of four feet. I then realized the men were not coming to my hut — they had been killed in action or were prisoners of war. I attempted to give some of the jackets away but the other crews thought they were bad luck and nobody wanted them. They were burned and forgotten.”



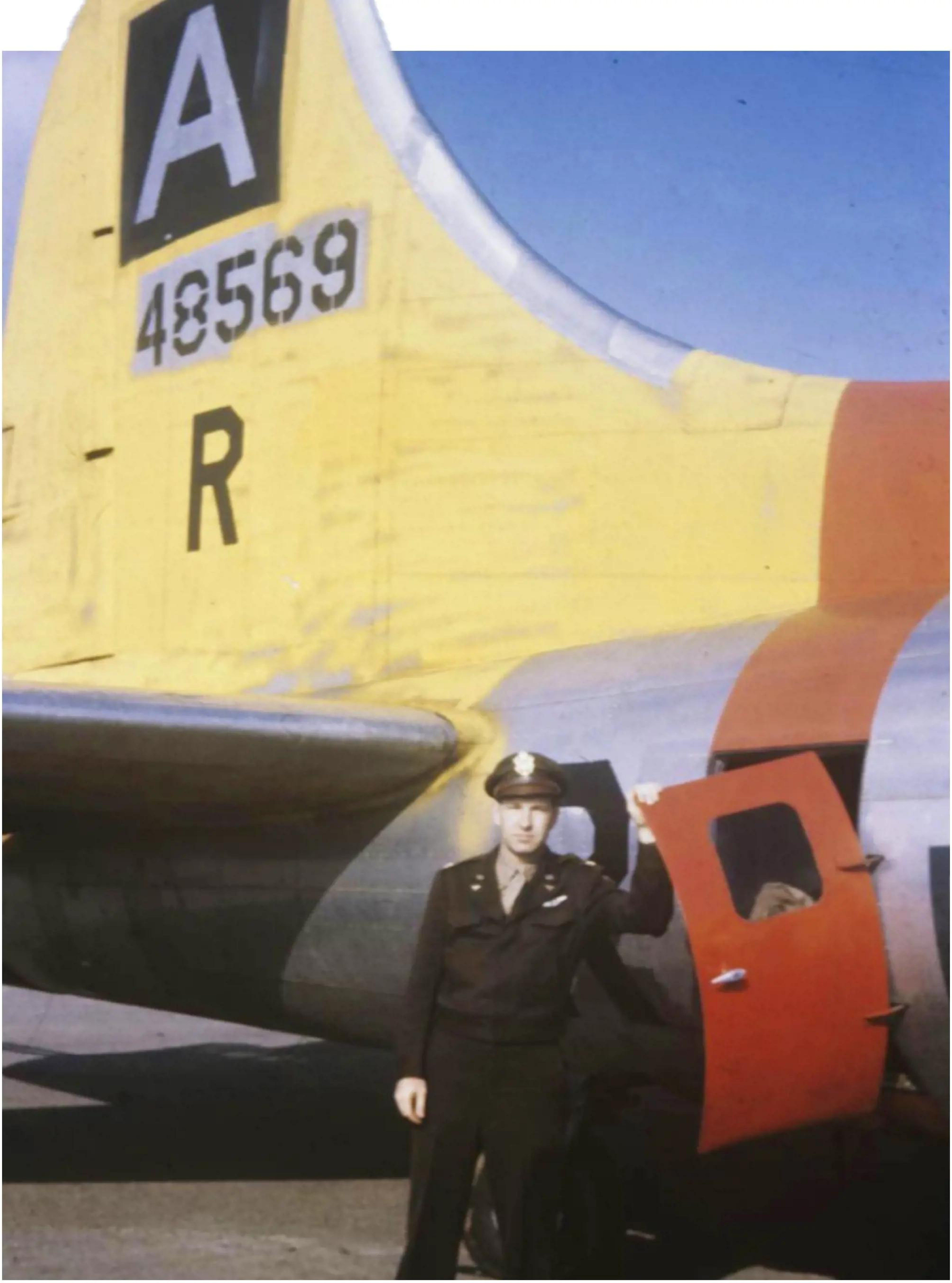
*HI-HO SILVER* was the name given to B-17G-35-BO 42-32116, perhaps because the bomber was one of the first G models delivered without paint. The Fort survived the war to be scrapped at Kingman. The crew chief was photographed warming the engines during another freezing day for the 91st BG at Bassingborn.



*THE BAD PENNY ALWAYS COMES BACK* was painted on the nose of B-17F-45-VE 42-6097 of the 339th Bomb Squadron, 96th Bomb Group, with the individual code of QJ*O. Airmen are nothing if not superstitious and the plane did keep returning, this becoming a "lucky" bomber. As newer Forts became available, she was converted for crew training. She survived the war to return to the States and be salvaged at Albuquerque.



Olive Drab paint did not do well in the British weather. The original OD applied at Boeing on B-17G 42-38058 has almost completely bleached out. There are large areas of overpainting and these may have been done with OD or with locally available RAF paint. *The Wish Bone* was flying with the 516th BS, 379th BG, when photographed. Damaged a number of times in combat, the bomber returned to England to be scrapped at Kingman.



Major Byron Trent does not look particularly happy as he poses by the rear entrance door of B-17G-75-VE 44-8569 of the 94th Bomb Group. Trent was the commanding officer of the 333rd Bomb Squadron at Bury St. Edmunds. Major Trent managed to get a few rolls of 35mm Kodachrome and took photos around the base and during combat missions. This shot is of interest because it shows the bomber's unit markings to great advantage. Note how the paint is flat and how it has been applied in a very rough and thin manner. The entry door was used as a guide line for applying the red identification stripe. The serial was simply blocked off, covered over, and when the paint was applied then the paper was removed — leaving the black serial against the bare metal like it was when the aircraft left the factory. **AC**

# PATTERN FOR VICTORY

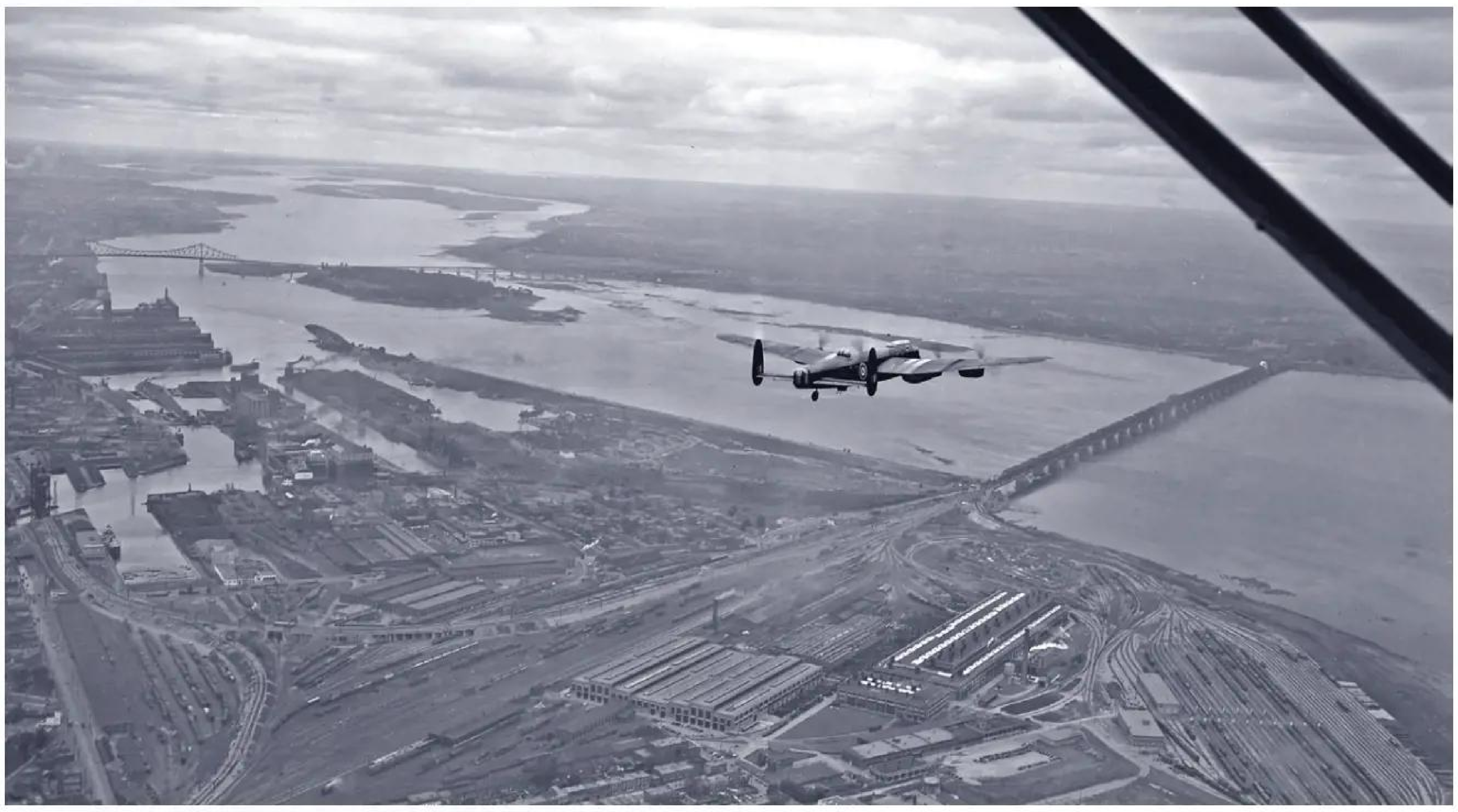
*BRITAIN DESPERATELY NEEDED HEAVY BOMBERS TO WAGE WAR AGAINST GERMANY. AN AUDACIOUS PLAN WAS UNDERTAKEN TO BUILD AVRO LANCASTERS IN CANADA*

**BY C.E. COLBY**

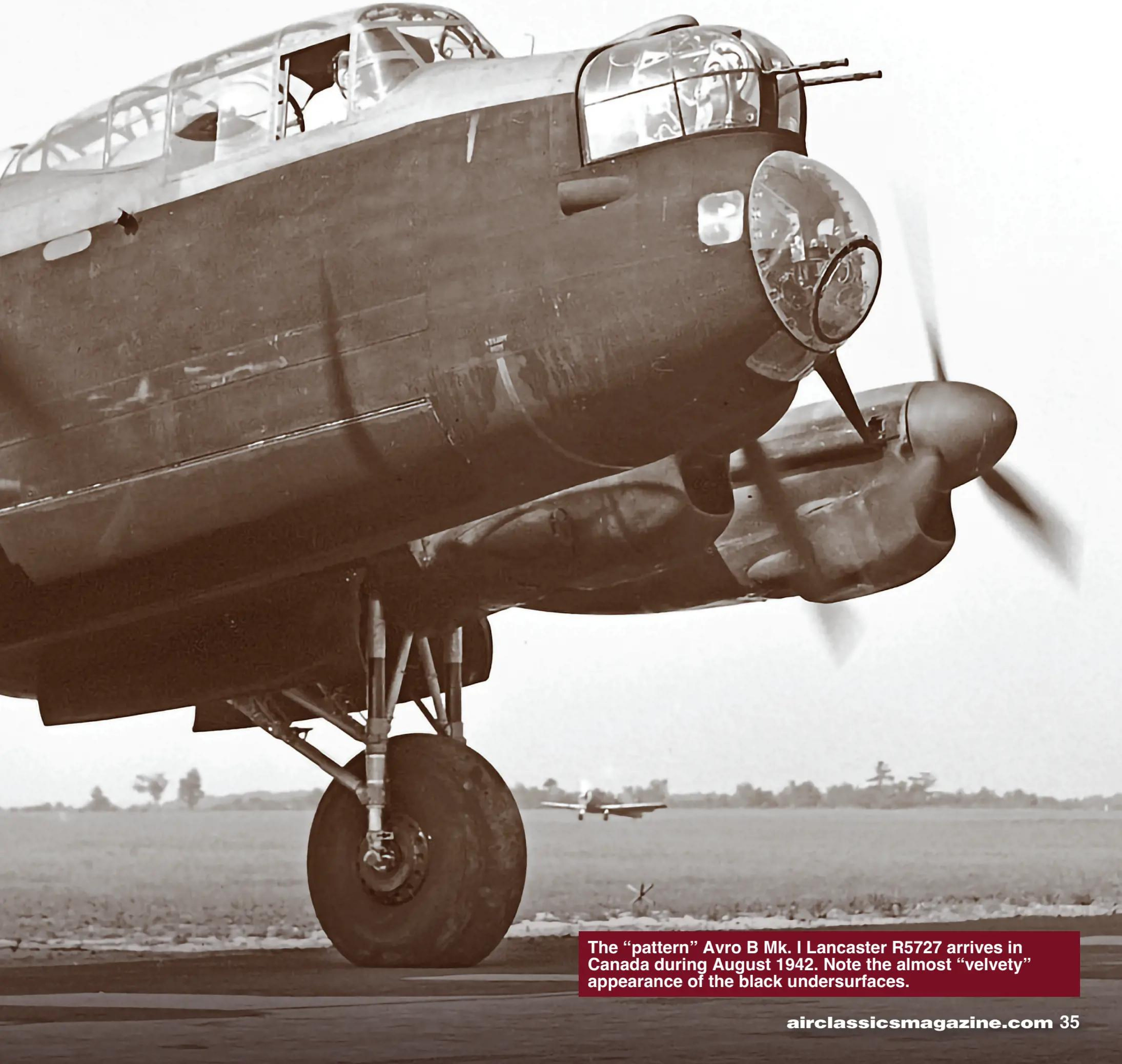
The year was 1940 and in Britain the situation was dire. Germany's vaunted *Luftwaffe* had begun massive attacks on the island nation and after the British defeat in France and the evacuation at Dunkirk, Winston Churchill noted that the future of his nation was "in doubt."

With air bases, cities, and factories under attack from the air, the U-Boats prowled the sea — sinking many of the cargo ships bringing war and food supplies to Britain. With war production under threat, a new system of supplying combat aircraft had to be devised.

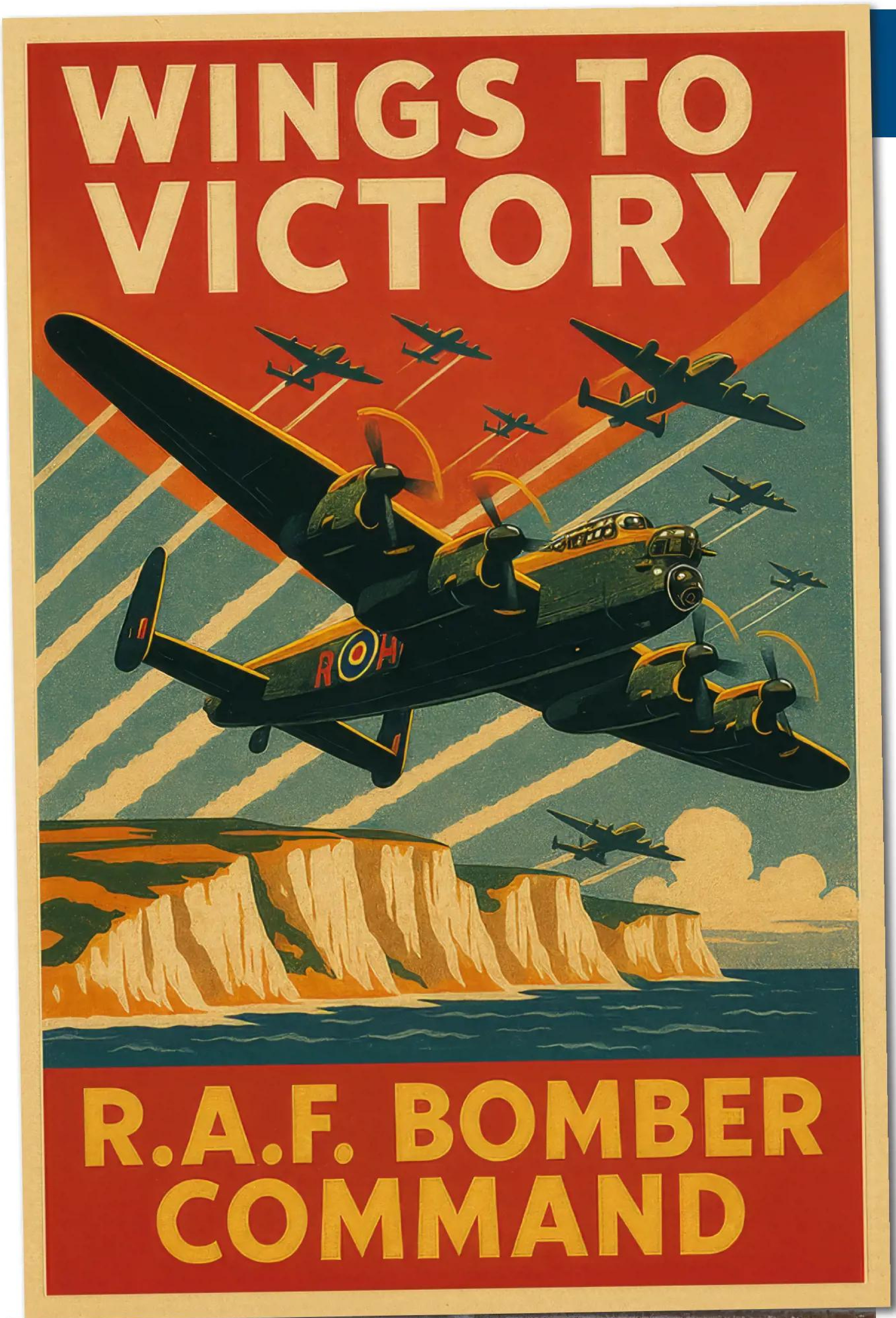
The Commonwealth nation of Canada was far from the raging battles taking place over and near Britain. The



**The Lancaster announcing its arrival on 24 August 1942 after having taken off from Dorval (a stop for refueling). The bomber was photographed going over the St. Lawrence River and was flying east towards St-Hubert Airport. The flight was featured in the 28 September 1942 issue of *Life* magazine.**



**The "pattern" Avro B Mk. I Lancaster R5727 arrives in Canada during August 1942. Note the almost "velvety" appearance of the black undersurfaces.**



**Poster depicting RAF Lancasters heading out over the White Cliffs to attack Germany. The British needed more Lancasters and the Canadians rose to the challenge.**

massive country was protected by the span of the Atlantic Ocean and the population was comprised of skilled individuals that could be easily trained for the production of aircraft and other items needed for the war against the Axis.

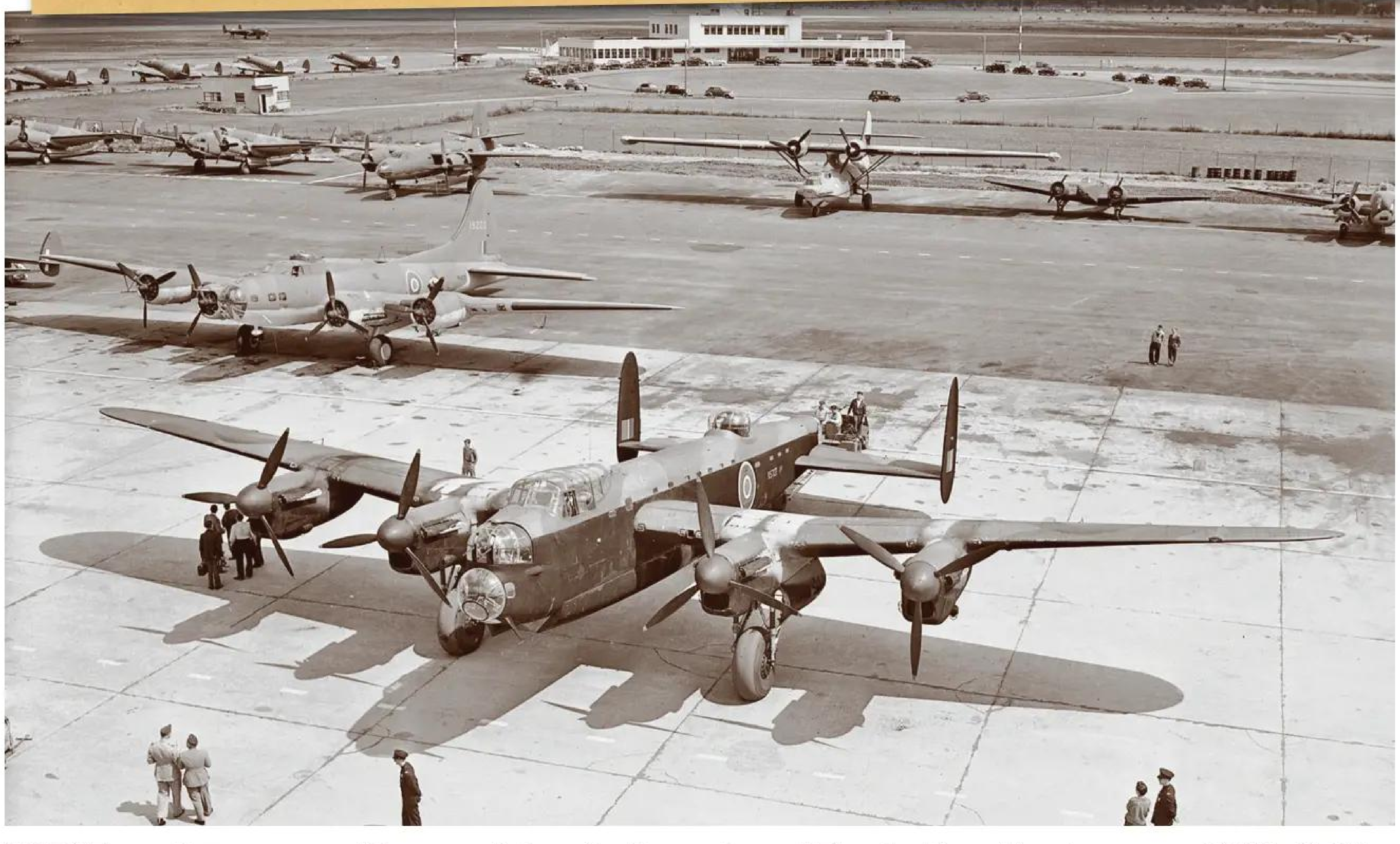
Canada had a strong aviation tradition — aircraft were needed to traverse the nation's immense distances. However, building aircraft was somewhat alien to the Canadian aviation industry.

National Steel Car Limited was headquartered in Hamilton and contracts had been worked out with Westland in England to license-build the Westland Lysander. Production on this unusual aircraft began in 1939 and would lead to more contracts for the production of vital warplanes.

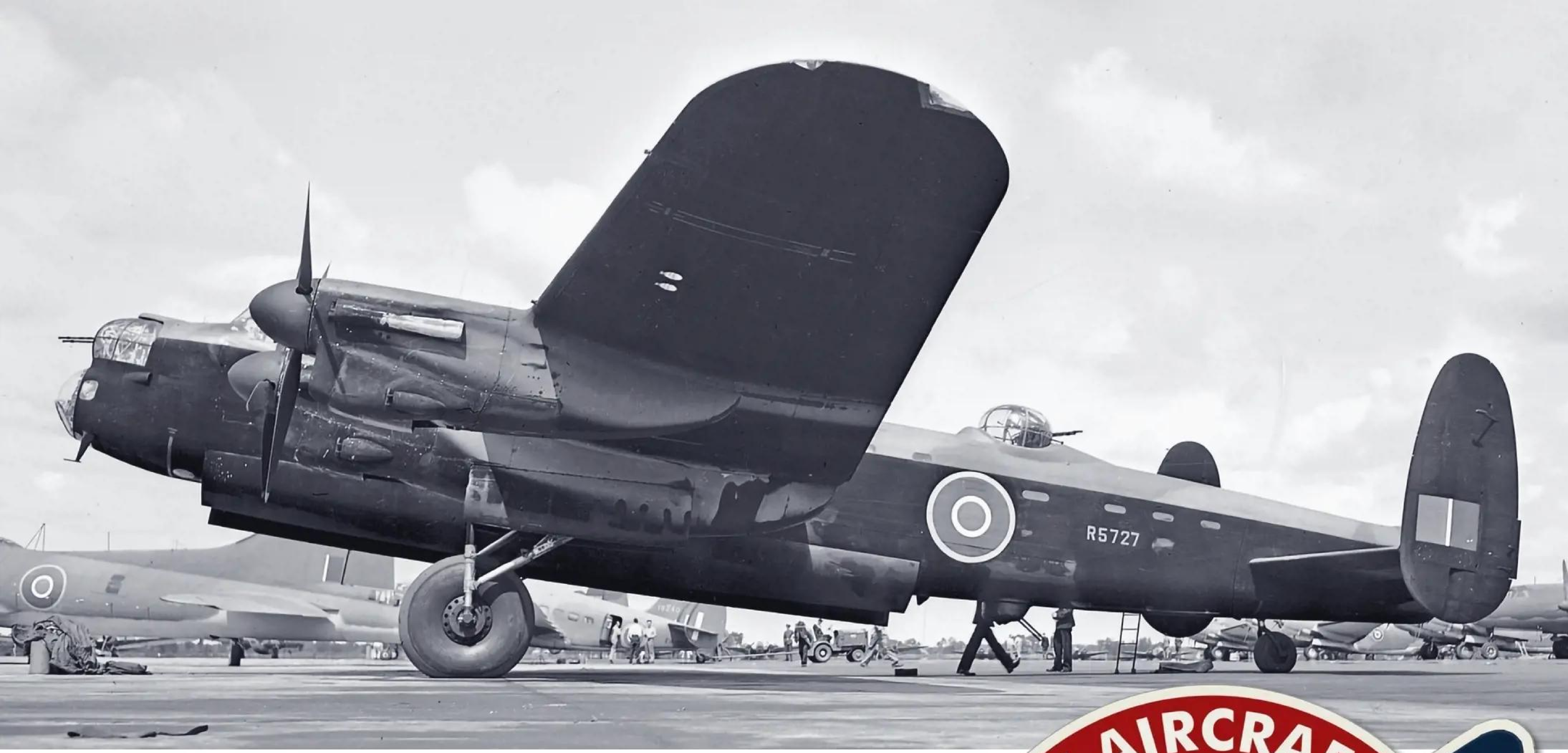
As can be imagined, there were problems as production was set up to build airplanes. National Steel Car Ltd. was Canada's largest builder of railway rolling stock but had no aviation experience. Established in 1912, the company was suffering difficulties during the Great Depression. In order to stay in business, National Steel Car diversified by building trucks, bus bodies, and outboard motors. Basically, the company would take on any project that would allow them to stay in business. Then came the military build-up for the coming war. With the Westland contract, the Malton plant was soon filled with aeronautical engineers and workers skilled in setting up aircraft production lines. All this was, of course, a bit alien to the builders of rail cars but the company realized this was their chance to stay alive.

In relatively short order, the ungainly Lysanders began to emerge from the factory and this was followed by subcontracts from Canadian Car and Foundry for Hawker Hurricanes, Avro Ansons from Canadian Federal Aircraft Limited, and Handley Page Hampdens from the Canadian Associated Aircraft consortium.

During 1940, every available Hawker Hurricane in Canada had been shipped overseas to aid the Royal Air Force in stopping the *Luftwaffe*. This left Canada without a modern fighter



**R5727 on the ramp with a variety of other aircraft including Venturas, a PBY, B-26, Fortress, and Oxford.**



R5727 spreads its broad wings at RCAF Rockcliffe following its epic journey. After serving as a pattern aircraft, the Lanc was acquired by Trans-Canada Airlines, overhauled, fitted with ten seats, extra fuel tanks, and went to work ferrying passengers, air mail, and freight on transatlantic service. It was issued the civilian license CF-CMS.

aircraft. In the Royal Canadian Air Force, two Lysander squadrons had been chosen to be reequipped with Hurricanes but now there were no aircraft for the transition. Accordingly, it was decided to designate the lumbering Lysander units as fighter squadrons!

Obviously, no one in the RCAF thought this was a smart move. On the country's West Coast, No. 118 and No. 111 Squadrons suddenly became fighter units and the Lysander crews were given instruction on how to best use the observation aircraft against possible aggression from the Japanese. Almost every day, the Lysanders growled into the air as instructors showed the pilots how to

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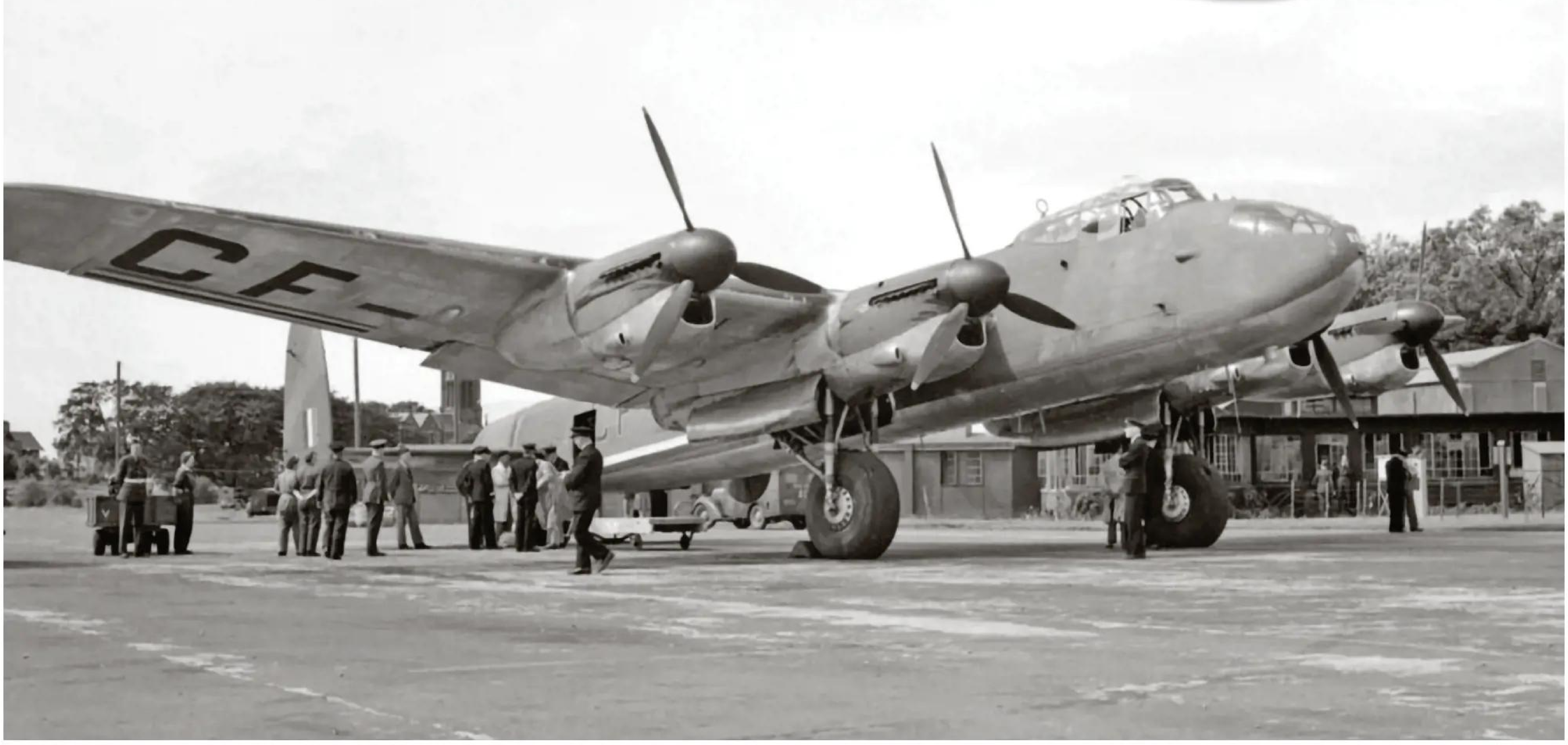
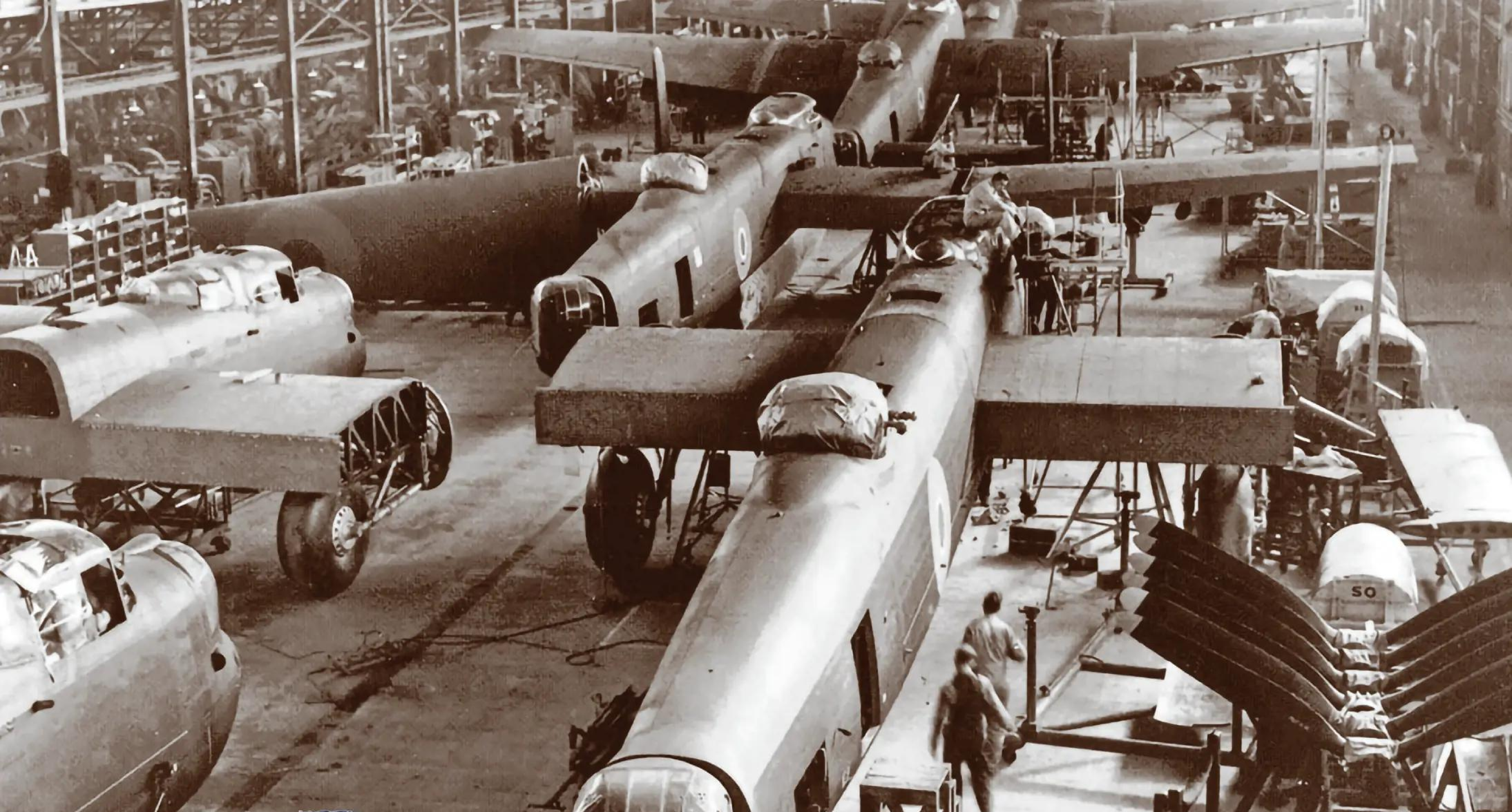


R5727 in its civil markings as CF-CMS. Note the red/white/blue stripes down the sides of the fuselage along with the large registration letters. These were added in the hope that a long-range *Luftwaffe* fighter would leave the Lanc alone after realizing it was a civilian plane. Nose turret has been removed and fitted with a custom glass nose. Photographed at Prestwick, Scotland, the Lanc began cargo service on the hazardous run during July 1943 and then began taking passengers in 1944. The plane was withdrawn from the transatlantic flights and was fitted with Merlin 85s in Avro Lincoln cowlings for testing prior to production work switching from Lancasters to Lincolns. However, on 1 June 1945 it crashed and burned at Dorval Airport.



**Lancaster Mk. Xs under construction. Note the rows of propellers. During March 1941, Nash-Kelvinator was contracted under license by the US government to build 1500 Hamilton-Standard Hydromantic variable pitch aircraft propellers per month. By 1945, they had built and assembled 158,134 three-blade props that were shipped to England to fit on Lancasters along with the 430 Mk. Xs at Malton. They also built a stunning 85,656 blades as spares.**

PER ARDVA AD ASTRA
ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

engage with enemy fighters.

In September 1940, the squadron was disbanded and then in December 1940 it was reformed — still as a fighter squadron. The Lysanders were now gone but the pilots were given perhaps an even worse airplane with which to engage the enemy — 15 unwanted Grumman Goblins that had been built by Canadian Car and Foundry. Fortunately, America stepped in and, via Lend-Lease, No. 118 Squadron (along with No. 111 Squadron) was soon flying the Curtiss Kittyhawk. Finally, the pilots were able to put their fighter training to use with a real combat aircraft.

Back in Britain and with victory over the *Luftwaffe* in the Battle of Britain, bombers were needed to strike deep into the heart of Germany. The Avro Manchester had proven to be a failure but through re-engineering it was reworked into the brilliant Avro Lancaster. The RAF desperately needed this new bomber — and they needed lots of them.

Accordingly, a manufacturing plan was created to build the Lancaster in Canada and far away from the threat of German air attack. Lysanders and Hurricanes were one thing, the massive Lancaster was an assignment of almost impossible proportion. The nation had to change from its mainly agricultural base — and a base that had suffered with the Great Depression — into an aviation powerhouse. Just one Lancaster required some 500,000 manufacturing operations and this involved approximately 55,000 parts. This number excluded bits like rivets and nuts and bolts. Then, the mounting of the Merlin engines and defensive turrets were classified as just one part — even though each engine and turret comprised thousands of parts!

Blueprints, manuals, and drawings were soon being flown across the Atlantic in Liberators converted to transports. Canadian workers had to step forward and learn new tasks. However, it would be helpful if they had a "real" aircraft from which to learn. Accordingly, during August 1942 Lancaster R5752 was flown across the Atlantic to serve as a reference model, or "pattern" aircraft. The plane was flown across under the command of famed long-distance flyer Clyde Pangborn and this was the first east to west crossing for a Lancaster.

In the meantime, the war was moving ahead at a furious pace and the Canadian government decided to establish a Crown Corporation with the name of Victory Aircraft. The government became concerned that the management of National Steel could not handle the massive project that was soon to start and the government took over operations. The new organization was located at the National Steel facility at Malton, Ontario, and it was created specifically to handle the construction of the Lancaster and

*(continued on page 72)*

Our rebuild of the Allison-powered Bf 109.

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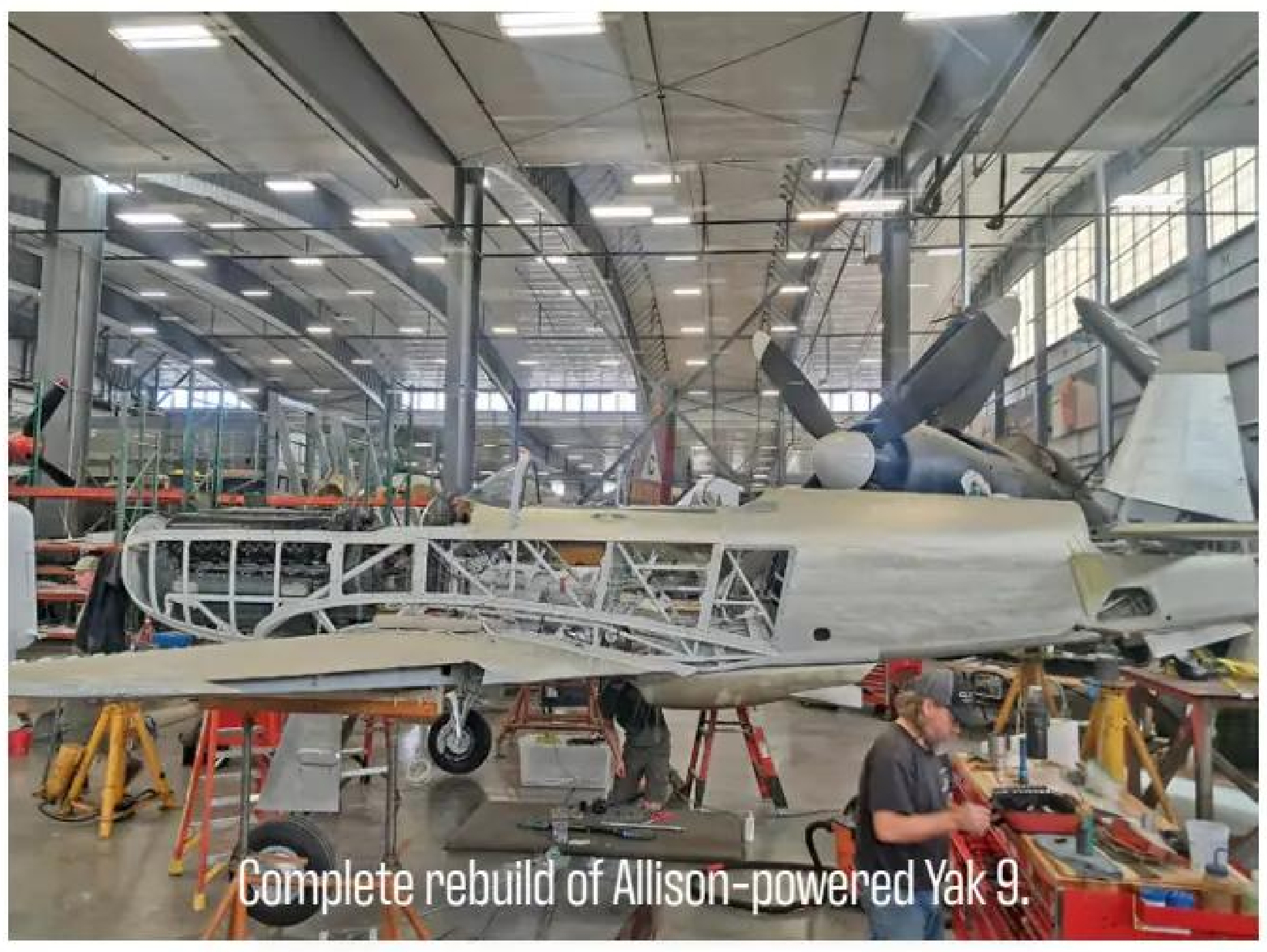
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# DESTINATION TOKYO!

### *THE WARBIRD SHOP HAS COMPLETED A MAGNIFICENT RESTORATION OF AN EARLY MODEL NORTH AMERICAN MITCHELL*

### BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Destination TOKYO

**Doug and Brennan bring *Destination Tokyo* in tight with Matt Nightingale in the camera Texan.**

Los Angeles Times
TOKYO BOMBED!
NORTH AMERICAN B-25 BOMBERS BLAST KEY JAP CITIES
Allied C
Hit Ca

"*Yes Sir* – THAT'S MY BABY!"

"Look—I haven't much time to talk, but—

"You know how the Japs screamed when we bombed Tokyo for the first time. Great, huh? It sure sounded good to me, because I helped build the planes that did the job.

"Those planes were North American B-25 bombers. Remember that name, because you're going to hear it a lot before this war's over. You can bet your sweet life the Japs and Germans will remember it.

"So far we hear that a B-25 was the first American Army plane to sink a U-boat in the Atlantic. B-25s were the first to bomb the Japs in the Philippines. B-25s were the first to bomb Tokyo.

"And that's only the beginning.

"It takes thousands of us to build a B-25. It takes teamwork, with everybody giving his best. But teamwork's what we *got*—and you're on our team too, whether you know it or not. When you buy Bonds and pay taxes, when you save scrap, when you go without new tires or aluminum pots and pans, why then you're helping us and helping yourself too.

"So thanks for what you're doing, and you can depend on what we're doing. Next time you read about the B-25, just say, 'I helped build that plane,' the way we say it here. And you can celebrate the way we do—by working harder than ever at your job, instead of knocking off and throwing a party.

"It'll take plenty to beat this Axis gang, but we're the guys who can do it!"

NORTH AMERICAN AVIATION, INC.
Main Plant, Inglewood, Calif.

NORTH AMERICAN
*Sets the Pace*

**FIRST** to bomb Tokyo were North American B-25s commanded by General Doolittle.

**FIRST** to build *three planes* with the same amount of aluminum formerly needed to build *one!*

**BONDS BUY BOMBERS!**
The War Savings Bonds you buy put bombers in the air. Buy Bonds every payday!

U. S. Navy, SNJ-3 . . . For RAF, "Harvard"

NULLI SECUNDUS

**RAF Mitchells being prepared for a raid on France. The aircraft would come into the target at medium to low altitude but the medium heights made them targets for accurate *Luftwaffe* anti-aircraft fire. Preferred method was to come in as low as possible with throttles all the way forward.**

Over the years — no, I have to say over the *decades* — the ramp in front of the Aero Sport hangars at Chino Airport has seen the coming and going of the majority of the world's flying North American B-25 Mitchell population. The 23rd of October 2025 was a pleasant fall day at the field and I was awaiting the arrival of a Mitchell that had last operated from Chino on 1 November 1987 — almost 40 years ago and that leads to the old statement of "where does the time go?"

With this particular B-25, that span of time has seen a number of significant events. Courtesy of Jim Martinelli of The Warbird Shop, a photo flight had been arranged so that we could complete the latest chapter in the craft's history. Such a project requires a lot of coordination — Jim and his staff, the B-25 crew, Matt Nightingale of Cal Aero-Sport, and Carl Scholl of Aero Trader.

The distinctive note of the B-25 entering the downwind, brought a number of people out onto the ramp and they were soon rewarded with the sight and sound of the Mitchell taxiing to parking — the Wright R-2600s making the characteristic popping and banging as the freshly-finished Olive Drab and Neutral Gray bomber pulled into parking.

Once the engines were shut down, the crew hatch dropped open and Doug Griffin and Brennan Lash emerged. "Everything ran great!" exclaimed Doug regarding the flight from the paint shop at Santa Maria. Doug is a high-time guy when it comes to the "Big Props" while Brennan comes from a family that has been deeply involved in aviation. Both men were extremely enthusiastic about the newly-restored B-25 and were soon being bombarded with questions from the numerous spectators that had gathered to see the arrival of the rare early B-25D variant.

North American B-25D-30-NC USAAF 43-3318 was completed at the company's Kansas City facility and accepted by the USAAF on 27 October 1943. The aircraft was assigned to La Junta Army Air Field in Colorado where it arrived on 1 November 1943. La Junta was a former civilian field that in 1940 was leased by the War Department for pilot training of Royal Air Force and Royal Canadian Air Force aviators in the operation of four-engine bombers.

During 1942 and with America now in the war, the field was taken over by the USAAF and assigned to the Western Flying Training Command. The facility was greatly expanded to accommodate a large number of aircraft and training flights. The three runways, in characteristic triangle configuration, were expanded to 8000-feet by 150-feet each while a very large ramp area was added along with taxiways, several large hangars, and all the necessary airfield buildings. Four auxiliary airfields were also constructed to accommodate training flights and emergency landings.

The field was activated on 2 November 1942 (illustrating just how capable this country was in building such a facility in an extremely short time period) and designated as an advanced twin-engine flying school under the jurisdiction of the 83rd Flying Training Wing. Soon after, large numbers of B-25C/D Mitchells began arriving. They would be accompanied by Cessna AT-19s, Curtiss AT-9s, and Vultee BT-13s.

At La Junta, our subject aircraft began the strenuous task of training USAAF multi-engine pilots and the sky was literally filled all day with Mitchells as America built the world's largest pilot training program. However, instead of remaining as a USAAF trainer, a new life lay ahead for our Mitchell.

## OFF TO THE GREAT WHITE NORTH

With the USAAF receiving massive numbers of new and upgraded B-25J Mitchells, there became a decreasing need for the "old" B-25s. However, these aircraft still had a great deal of usefulness.

To the north, Canada had a need for these earlier variants for its extensive training program that was turning out tens of thousands of aircrew to fight on the different battle fronts. Canada's first Mitchells were diverted from Royal Air Force orders and these included one Mitchell Mk. I (the B-25 designation was dropped in favor of using the name and then a Mark number to denote the particular variant), 42 Mitchell Mk. IIs, and 19 Mitchell Mk. IIIs.

Even though newer variants were available, the RAF was flying the B-25C/D in combat and wanted to maintain a level of commonality so more such aircraft were requested from the American government. On 10 November 1944, 44-3318 was pulled from the active inventory at La Junta and flown to Kelly Field in Texas where it was assigned to the 4121st Base Unit. At Kelly, the aircraft was given a complete overhaul and new R-2600 radials were added. The reason for this activity was that the B-25D had been selected for transfer to the RCAF.

With work completed by 16 January 1945, the bomber became Mitchell Mk. II KL161. It was then flown to Sea Island, British Columbia, where it was taken on strength on 19 January. At Sea Island, the plane went to No. 22 Sub-Repair Depot for modifications to RAF standard and this included T-1 bomb sight, RAF dinghies, winterization, and fire control system, along with painting. The Royal Air Force had been successfully operating six squadrons of Mitchells with the 2nd Tactical Air Force and many RCAF officers and men were flying the type. KL161 began operations with the Western Air Command's No. 5 Operational Training Unit (OTU) where it was used to train future Liberator pilots. Since the RAF and RCAF were already operating the B-25C/D, these additional planes meant the training syllabus would not have to be rewritten to accommodate newer B-25Js.

In RCAF service, KL161 flew out of Boundary Bay until the end of the war. On 11 February 1946, the Mitchell was assigned to No. 1 Air Command and on 18 February 1947, it entered storage at RCAF Station Trenton in Ontario while the future of the post-war RCAF was planned. On 23 December of that year, KL161 was inspected and its condition was noted as "fair" with 1832:15 hours of logged time.

The Mitchell was then assigned to the Central Flying School at Trenton. Logs note that the aircraft had recorded 2036:35 hours by 31 March 1949 and on 13 September of that year, it was sent back into storage — this time with No. 6 Repair Depot, also at Trenton.

On 30 June 1952, it was brought out of storage and flown to Northwest Industries at Edmonton, Alberta. This civilian operation had won a contract to bring RCAF Mitchells back to flying condition with numerous upgrades. This task was completed and on 19 August 1954, KL161 was assigned to Air Defense Command and operated by No. 3 All-Weather (AW) Operational Training Unit at RCAF North Bay in Ontario. This was during the massive build-up of USAF/RCAF forces in the far north to counter any possible Soviet attack. KL161 continued to operate in this role until 22 April 1958 when it was flown to Bristol

## NAA B-25D MITCHELL

**Completed B-25Ds await flight testing at Fairfax. Aircraft were delivered in overall Olive Drab/Neutral Gray with national insignia in standard positions. Red propeller warning stripes were applied on the fuselage. For the restoration, historian Steve Whitby aided by providing correct data for the placement of the markings. Note the Fairfax name on the hangar in the left background. (NAA)**

The D Model of the B-25 series derived directly from the B-25C, which was built at the company's facility in Inglewood, California. The B-25C itself was an improvement on the B-25B (the aircraft used by the Doolittle Raiders) and Wright R-2600-13 radials replaced the B's R-2600-9 powerplants. De-icing boots were added to the flying surfaces and armament was slightly increased to accommodate two Browning machine guns in the nose. The B-25C was the first mass-produced variant of the Mitchell and a total of 1625 aircraft were constructed. The variant was supplied to Allies including Canada, United Kingdom, China, Soviet Union, and Netherlands. In order to increase the numbers of the type, production was also undertaken at the new North American plant at Kansas City (Fairfax), Kansas. Initially virtually identical, the designation of B-25D-NC was given to the Kansas-built aircraft. The Kansas plant would produce 2290 D Models and many of these aircraft would be supplied to Allied air forces.

With coastal factories vulnerable to possible enemy attacks, it was decided to create major factories much further inland. The government acquired land next to the Fairfax Municipal Airport and on 16 November 1940 construction of the new facility was approved. Ground breaking was on 8 March 1941 and on 17 April of that year, the first employee moved into his office. On 23 December, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the first B-25D-NC was completed and it was 41-29648. Named *Miss Greater Kansas City*, the bomber had been painted overnight by Larry Cantrall for a visit by Harry S. Truman, who was then a US senator. On 3 January 1942, *Miss Greater Kansas City* was taken aloft on its first flight by veteran NAA test pilot Paul Balfour.

The initial contract called for 1200 B-25D-NC bombers under Model NA-87. Identical to the B-25C-NA, many of these aircraft would be completed with B-25C parts. All across the country, massive orders were pouring in for new warplanes and NAA received a contract to build 200 B-29 Superfortresses under license from Boeing. By June 1942 (the Doolittle Raid taking place in April of that year) it was obvious that more B-25s were needed. Accordingly, the B-29 contract was cancelled and a new contract for the Model NA-100 was signed on 26 June 1942 and this called for 1090 B-25D-NC bombers.

There were problems with suppliers so many of the components were brought "in house" and this increased production. Experts on producion from General Motors were brought in and the plant was redesigned and the assembly line was increased by 376,300-sq-ft without a delay in production. With these changes, the Fairfax plant would produce nearly four times the number of aircraft in 1943 compared to the previous year. Improvements and additions to the B-25D on the production line were constant.

Production of the B-25D was broken down as follows: B-25D-NC (NAA contract model NA-87) serials 41-29648/41-29847, 200 built; B-25D-1-NC (NA-87) 41-29848/41-29947), 100 built; B-25D-5-NC (NA-87) 41-29948/41-30172, 225 built; B-25D-10-NC (NA-87) 41-30173/41-30352, 180 built; B-25D-15-NC (NA-87) 41-30353/41-30847, 495 built; B-25D-20-NC (NA-100) 42-87113/42-87137, 25 built; B-25D-25-NC (NA-100) 42-87113/42-87452, 315 built; B-25D-30-NC (NA-100) 42-87453/42-87612, 160 built, and 43-3280/43-3619, 340 built; B-25D-35-NC (NA-100) 43-3620/43-3869, 250 built.

**Mitchells from No. 98 Squadron being bombed up for a raid on France shortly after D-Day.**

Aircraft at Winnipeg for another overhaul and more modernization.

The plane went to the Central Flying School at Trenton on 15 August 1958 where it operated until 15 March 1959. At that time, it returned to Bristol Aircraft in Winnipeg where the R-2600s had Stromberg carburetors installed. After this work, KL161 went to the Central Experimental & Proving Establishment (CEPE), Aircraft Armament Detachment, at RCAF Station Cold Lake in Alberta. On 26 April 1960, it went to the CEPE at RCAF Uplands but by October 25 of that year it had been placed in inactive reserve at RCAF Lincoln Park, Calgary. Time was catching up with the old veteran.

## HEADING TO CIVVIE STREET

These older Mitchells had served the RCAF long and well but the decision was made to withdraw the survivors during 1960 and then offer them for surplus sale. The USAF had also stood down its B-25Js at about the same time and these aircraft were flown to Davis-Monthan AFB for storage and auction so quite a few B-25s would be heading to civil ownership. The RCAF planes were in extremely good condition and during February 1962, KL161 was sold to a buyer in Vancouver where it was given the civil registration of CF-OGQ and struck off RCAF strength on the 12th of that month. At this time, the aircraft had a total of 3885 flight hours with 1660 hours since its major overhaul. The plane was then ferried to Vancouver where, like many civil Mitchells, it just sat until 1966. That is when it was purchased by Jim Ausland and flown to his Sport Air facility in Seattle, Washington.

At its new home, the plane was registered N88972 but it just sat. Ausland realized Mitchells were selling really cheap and he wound up with five of them (along with a P-51 and a P-38!). “Hell, with five of the damn things, I knew I had to sell a couple,” Ausland would later recount to the author. He did just that and the new buyer was Colco Aviation in Fairbanks, Alaska, who acquired the Mitchell (an ominous note in the Colco logs stated that the oil coolers had to be replaced after “sabotage” but we were unable to find out exactly what this meant).

At the time, it was discovered that the Mitchell could be a good workhorse in Alaska and it was converted to hold a 1000-gallon tank in the bomb bay and this was originally utilized to contain coal dust or sand. The company got a contract to free Alaskan rivers of ice and N88972 would get down low over the river while dispersing its load of sand or coal dust. This material caused the ice to crack apart and disperse, freeing the rivers for commerce. During April, it flew 23 hours and 15 minutes in these dusting missions. This was hazardous flying and the copilot would always be watching for cables and other obstacles while the pilot concentrated on flying and releasing the load.

In 1969, the plane was purchased by North Star Aviation and that year it flew 317 fire-bomber hours and 45 dusting hours. In July 1970, an R-2600 had to be replaced and total time for year amounted to 18 hours of river dusting and 78 hours as a fire-bomber under contract to the Bureau of Land Management. In 1972, it flew 42 hours 15 minutes dusting and then soon went into storage along with several other Mitchells performing the same task.

By 1977, N88972 was parked in the dirt at Fairbanks. In 1980, ownership passed to Noel Merrill Wien of Fairbanks. When it came to aviation in Alaska, the Wien family was just about as famous as it gets. Learning to fly at an early age, Merrill would go on to be a bush pilot, military pilot, and airline captain. “I always had a fondness for the B-25,” said Merrill. “It was a good, solid airplane and it could also be a good money-maker.

“Alaska had always been plagued with forest fires in the summer, which made visual flight difficult and destroyed a lot of virgin timber. The BLM was responsible for fighting the fires and they had four B-25s on contract; each could haul about 1000-gallons of borate. Having been trained in the B-25 during my time in the USAF, I saw a possible business opportunity. In 1959, I asked the BLM if they would put another B-25 on contract. They had enough but would let me know.

“I gambled anyway and put a bid on a B-25J at Davis-Monthan AFB, successfully budding $2750 for a low-time aircraft with only 240-hrs since IRAN.” The plane was flown to Idaho where it was tanked. It then went to Fairbanks for a very thorough inspection before being licensed with the FAA. Merrill hired several pilots and for the summer of 1960, the 25 was put on contract at $400 per hour. One day saw the Mitchell fly ten hours so it completely paid for itself in that single day. This led to another B-25 being bought in Fairbanks. This led to the purchase of a helicopter because Merrill could see the future of using rotary-wing aircraft in fire-fighting business. However, the next summer saw the lowest number of fires in the interior of Alaska so both

25s and the helo were sold.

B-25s were withdrawn from firebombing after four fatal accidents where the wings came off during drops. Suddenly, the market for 25s dropped and aircraft could be found parked at fields around the country. Merrill still maintained an enthusiasm for the type.

By the 1970s, the Warbird Movement had kicked off and Merrill was interested in obtaining an aircraft that could be put back into WWII configuration and flown at airshows. Merrill spotted N88972 sitting very neglected at Anchorage. He made a quick deal and found himself the owner of yet another Mitchell, although this one was a D and not the later Js that he had previously owned. In May 1980, he got it to Fairbanks where he worked on and off with the plane for the next seven years. During this time, he was a frequent visitor to Chino Airport and there is where he met Carl Scholl and learned of Carl's massive collection of B-25 parts.

"I wanted a good solid B-25," said Merrill. "I wanted it to look 100% military on the outside but I wanted the inside to be relatively comfortable — at least as comfortable as you can be in a Mitchell. After meeting with Carl and Tony, I knew they were the ones for the mission."

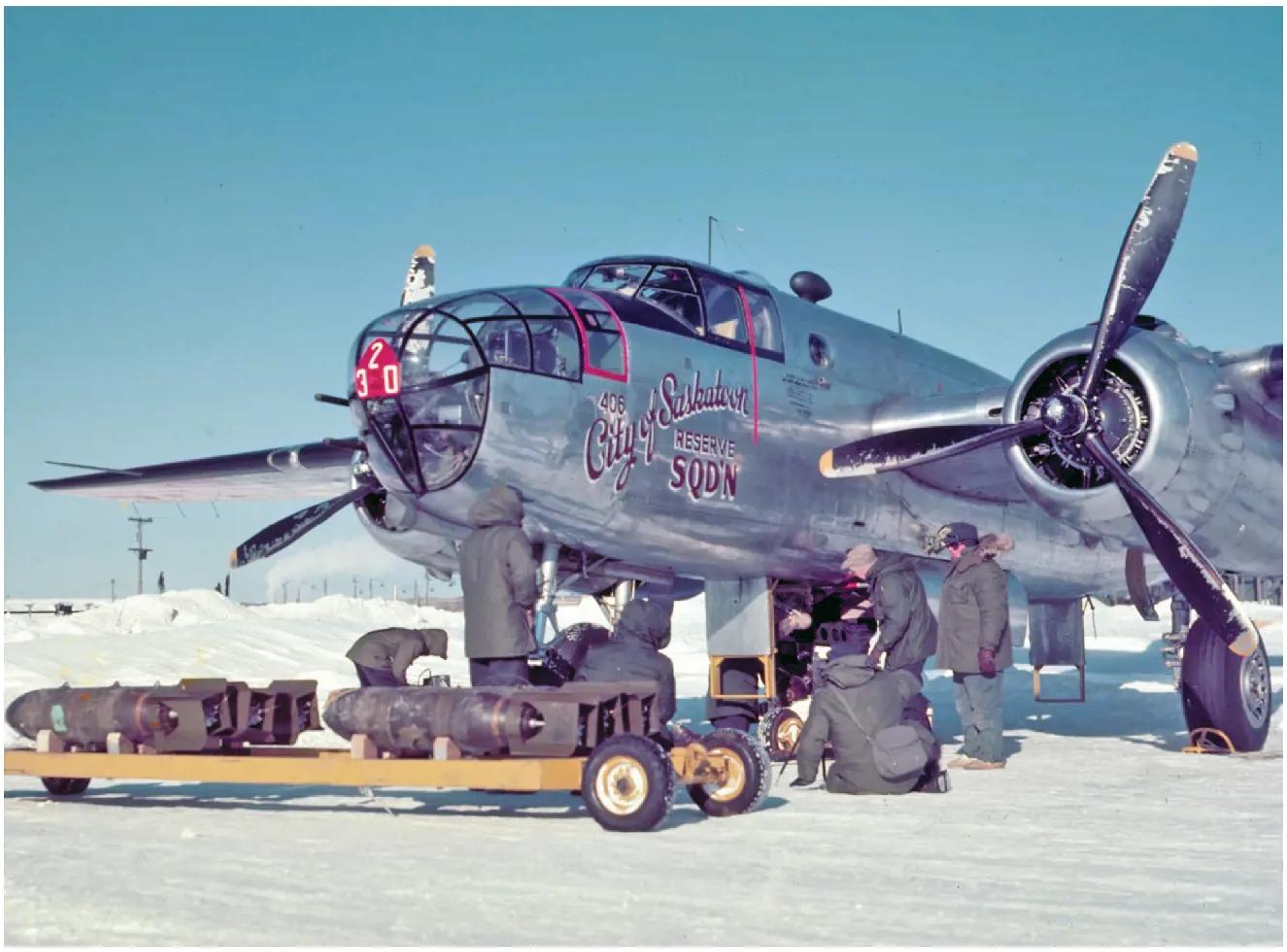
## ENTER AERO TRADER

"When I met Merrill Wien in the 1980s," recalled Carl. "I was immediately impressed by what a great guy he was and that he also had a deep knowledge of the B-25. At that time, Tony Ritzman and I were operating from my desert facility. That is where most of my B-25 material was stored and I had a dirt runway with powerlines crossing one end. Merrill came out and visited and we had four or five B-25s flying from our dirt strip at the time. However, Merrill definitely did not like the desert strip and said there was no way in hell he would bring his B-25D to that location for us to work.

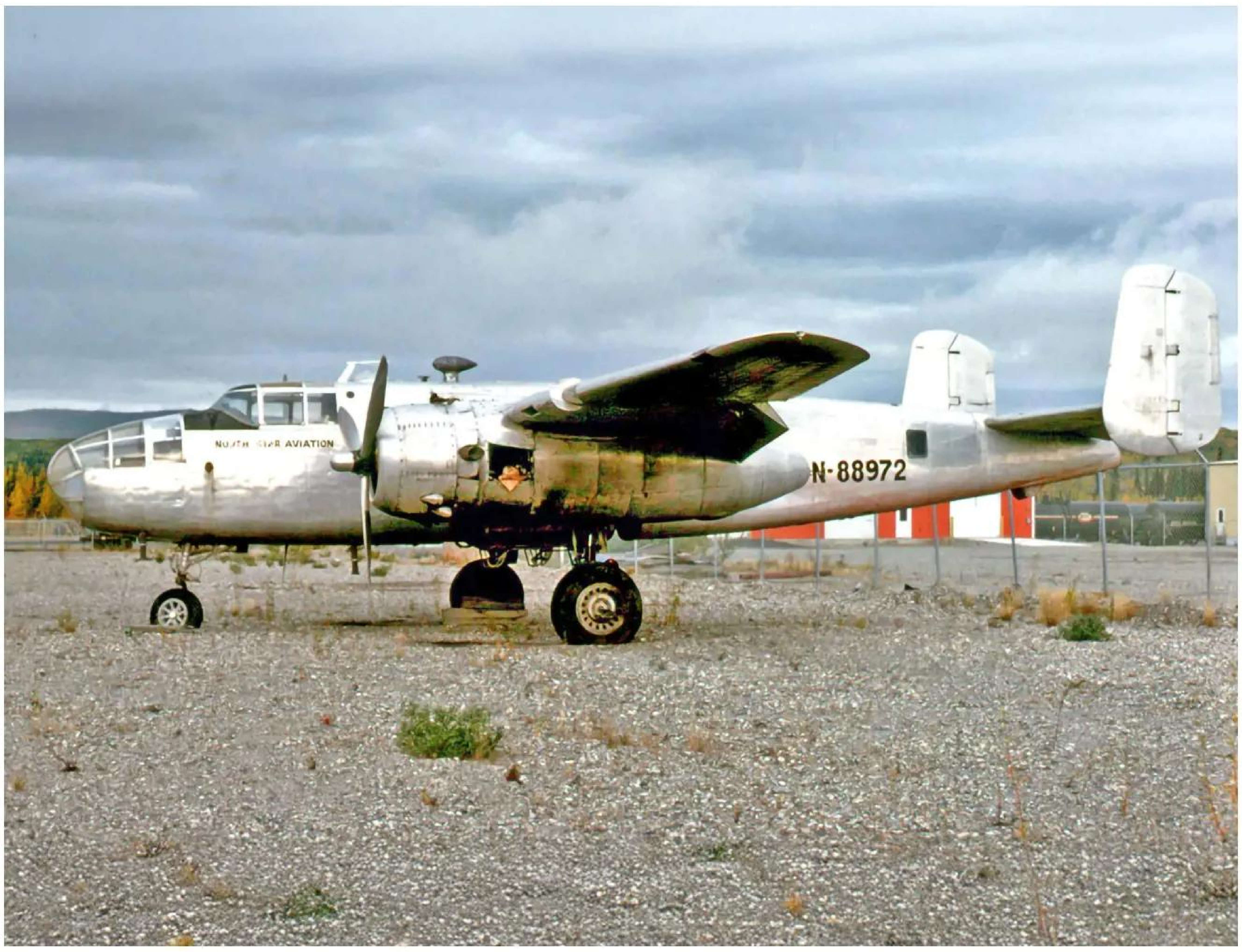
"Well, we were just getting established in this crazy Warbird business and what Merrill had to say made a lot of sense. Tony and I began scouting out different airports where we could have a paved runway and a hangar in which to do our work — and we needed the work.

"One of the fields we visited was at Chino and everything clicked — and why wouldn't it? There were several Warbird operations at Chino along with easy access to lots of stuff needed for aircraft restoration. We told Merrill we had found a facility at Chino. This pleased him and he flew the B-25D down from Fairbanks with Jeff Thomas as copilot and Aero Trader was now officially in business. You could really say that Merrill and the B-25D kicked off the start of Aero Trader."

"The Mitchell arrived and it looked in pretty good condition," said Tony Ritzman. "Carl and I have found that the Canadian aircraft, from being in cold climates most of their lives, have much less corrosion than the Mitchells that operated in the States. We managed to



**Post-war, the RCAF Mitchells had a long and excellent service history. This example was photographed being bombed up for a training exercise. In case of a land invasion or paratroop drop by the Soviets, the Mitchells would bomb the enemy whose primary target would have been DEW Line facilities.**



**N88972 going derelict at Anchorage and still wearing North Star Aviation titles below the cockpit. The plane has its bomb bay tank for coal dust spreading in place.**

**OVERLEAF:** **Superb Jim Larsen image of *Grumpy* shortly after it arrived at Paine Field for new owner John Sessions.**

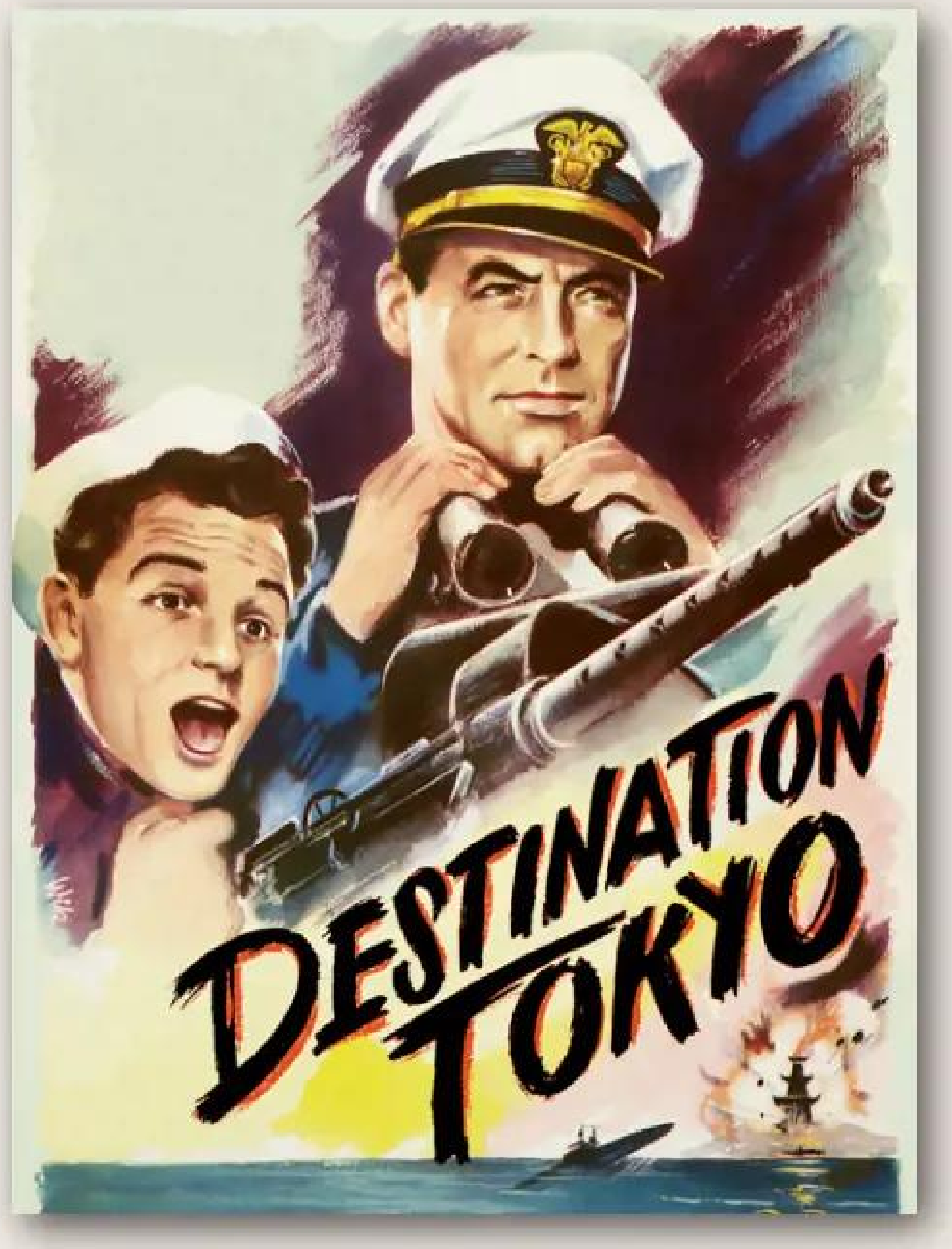
B
Grumpy

VO

## DESTINATION TOKYO — THE MOVIE

When I first saw the B-25D and *Destination Tokyo* on the nose, I thought perhaps the aircraft was named after a war-time film, a movie of which I had only a vague memory. I asked Jim Martinelli and he said the name was the owner's idea and represented the Doolittle Raid on Japan. Two other people on the ramp came up to me and asked, "Is it named after the movie?"

That led me to our resident film expert Bruce Orriss who added the facts. "It's interesting the owner picked that name," said Bruce "because the film does have a direct Doolittle tie-in. It was done by Warner Brothers and was released on 15 December 1943. For a war movie, it was pretty long and ran about 135 minutes. The plot involves the fictional USS *Copperfin* submarine as it sets out on a secret mission on Christmas Eve from Mare Island Naval Ship Yard. There are all sorts of plot twists and turns, the type of stuff you would expect in a Hollywood movie from the war. For example, the pharmacist's mate on the sub has to operate on a crew member that is stricken with appendicitis.



**Poster for *Destination Tokyo*.**

"The sub heads to the Aleutian Islands to pick up an expert meteorologist and they find out the reason for the mission – the sub has to enter Tokyo Bay where the meteorologist and two other men have to leave the sub and go ashore to make weather observations for the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo. Sound pretty far-fetched? It does but it ties in to another war film. *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* has dialog between the actor [Van Johnson] playing Ted Lawson and there is a discussion about a sub relaying information on barrage balloons in the area. Of course, there was no sub in Tokyo Bay for the raid but there is lots of excitement as the captain, played by Cary Grant, gets the *Copperfin* in and out of the bay. Heading home, the sub sinks an aircraft carrier then is attacked by its escorts and badly damaged. In the process, the sub sinks a destroyer before successfully making it home. There was lots of excitement for the movie-goer."

A lot more on *Destination Tokyo* and other wartime naval films can be found in Bruce's excellent book *When Hollywood Ruled the Seas*. Copies may be obtained through our book club for $30 by calling 818-700-6868.

lease a hangar and got the Mitchell inside and went to work and, for us, the creation of Aero Trader was pretty exciting."

The pair got busy and were working towards Merrill's goal of making the plane into a Warbird. However, financial problems got in the way. Wien Alaska Airlines, for which Merrill was flying as a captain, was suddenly the victim of a hostile takeover and Merrill lost his position. Thus, the Mitchell had to be sold.

At that time, the Warbird world was rapidly expanding and numerous collectors were buying airplanes — lots of them. In Minnesota, Bob Pond was establishing a magnificent collection and a new museum. In Britain, Stephen Grey was doing the same thing with his new The Fighter Collection at Duxford.

Pond already had a B-25J but Grey liked the idea of getting an early model and to finish in the colors of an RAF squadron that took the type into combat. I am still not quite sure how this all worked, but Pond got the plane from Merrill and it soon became the property of Grey. I would imagine taxes had something to do with it.

"Pond visited the aircraft at Chino," recalled Tony. "At the time, I was reconfiguring and modernizing the panel and I used photo cutouts of King instruments, radios, etc. and stuck them into place on the panel to give me an idea of configuration. Pond came out, put his head into the cockpit, saw the panel, and said 'Great looking panel. You guys are doing beautiful work.' I never told him they were just photos.

"Our mission with the plane was to do a very thorough IRAN [Inspection and Repair As Necessary]. We were going to add the top turret dome on the rear fuselage and the small bubble on the extreme tail. That piece proved to be a bit reclusive," said Tony.

"We finally took the tail bubble off the Hughes B-25C. It was yellow from sun exposure and had lots scratches but we very carefully and gently polished it over and over again until it looked almost factory-new," said Carl.

When Grey became the owner, a new task faced the Aero Trader crew — they had to extend the range of the bomber and that called for a bomb bay tank. The former borate tank was reworked for fuel along with the needed equipment to transfer the fuel to the main tanks. "I wanted a way to get rid of all that fuel in case we had an emergency," said Tony "so we fitted a dump system that worked pretty well."

Work moved forward at a rapid pace as Stephen Grey and the crew began to figure out a plan on how to get the plane to the UK. Grey hired race pilot John Crocker to perform the ferry. John had flown all sorts of Warbirds and had also undertaken many ocean delivery flights. "Stephen asked me if I wanted to come along," recalled Tony. "Of course, at that time I was young and dumb so I became the copilot. Stephen would be going along but, at that time, navigation was done by LORAN-C and I certainly was not proficient with that system. A decision was made to bring along an experienced ferry pilot who would be the navigator and who knew how to handle the LORAN-C. This led us to Doug Parkins who had delivered many general aviation aircraft across the Pacific and Atlantic. I also knew that this flight, undertaken in the winter, was going to be cold so we installed a heater that could warm up the cockpit area.

Test flights with the aircraft were undertaken during October 1987 and everything went quite well. By this point, another passenger had been added — British writer Peter Starr who was attempting to create a movie script on young ferry pilots during WWII.

On 1 November 1987, with the R-2600s banging and popping, the B-25D taxied away from Aero Trader and little did any of us realize it would be 38 years until the aircraft once again returned to Chino. Carl waved the bomber away as he had elected to stay behind and "run the shop."

The merry band headed east over

**Mitchell N88972 after being acquired by Merrill Wien and photographed at Fairbanks.**

increasingly bad weather and the goal was to reach Pond's Planes of Fame East Museum at Flying Cloud Airport in Minnesota. "As we got closer to the Rockies, the weather started to go bad. ATC made us climb and we went to 15,000 and began picking up ice," said Tony. "I had never been in ice with a B-25 and I did not like it. Suddenly, the left prop shed a chunk of ice and it shattered the window behind the pilot. This caused a freezing gale to enter the cabin and Stephen tried to cover it with some cardboard and tape. ATC then made us go to 17,000 and the weather was worse. We requested 13,000 and got down through the clouds and suddenly we could see forever."

As the bomber got closer to Flying Cloud, the weather got worse so a diversion was made into Watertown, South Dakota, where they spent the night (Chino to Watertown was seven hours), checking the plane, and replacing the window before leaving the next morning for Flying Cloud (one hour). "When we got to St. Cloud, Pond immediately put me to work doing something on his B-25J," recalled Tony.

The B-25D was filled with fuel, all systems checked once again, and it was off for the next stop — St. John's in Newfoundland. However, the weather would not let them leave and departure was delayed until 4 November. Any student of aviation history knows that St. John's was the starting point for many of the pioneering transatlantic flights so it was somewhat appropriate it would be the location for the start of the B-25's transatlantic hop.

"As we headed east, the weather kept getting worse," said Tony. "It also kept getting colder. When we arrived at St. John's (after 7.5-hours flying time), Stephen tried to get us into the one big hangar but it was filled with PBY fire-bombers on government contract so the Canadians weren't having any of that. The plane had to sit outside and the temperature dropped to 26degF. It was cold.

"The next morning (5 November), we loaded up all the gear, filled the tanks, and ran up the engines. Peter Starr, who was not an aviation person, was wearing one of those long plastic raincoats and I told him to get into the rear fuselage but noticed that the raincoat was completely covered in oil. I was puzzled and asked him about it and he said he was behind the left engine when it started.

"I told Crocker that we needed to check out a possible problem but he was in a hurry to get going since our ATC slot was beginning to run out of time. I thought to myself that this was not good. The right engine oil temp was good but I did not like the way the left gauge was looking and pointed it out to John who just sort of shrugged and said we were running out of time with ATC. We taxied from run-up and, looking over my shoulder, I could see a 4-ft puddle of oil with a long trail leading back to the ramp! This was definitely not good.

"I pointed this out to Crocker and we turned around and headed back to parking where a group of mad Canadians was looking at a huge puddle of oil on their ramp. Once we shut down and got out, I checked the left engine oil — 6 gallons in a tank that holds 37.5 gallons! The weather was pretty terrible and I figured we would have been about 500 feet into the clouds when the engine failed. That would have put us in a very bad place since we could not have gotten back into St. John's because of the weather, we would be very heavy with fuel, and the next suitable field was 250 miles distant.

"The cold weather during the night had shrunk the tubing clamp and pulled the oil hose loose. Thus, we had oil pouring into the left wing rather than returning to the tank. When we opened the underwing inspection panels, the oil just poured out. We spent rest of the day cleaning up the mess and retorquing all the clamps, and making sure the system functioned perfectly. The following day saw the weather clamp in and we stayed on the ground and worked on the plane."

Most WWII ferry flights departed St. John's to Iceland, then Greenland, and onto Scotland. Such a route is still followed today by many aircraft. However, since the B-25 had so much fuel, once they were airborne the next day (7 November) the decision was made to fly directly to Shannon, Ireland, and that is a long flight in a freezing cold B-25. "The heater sort of worked in the immediate cockpit," recalled Tony. "I was exhausted and wanted to take a short nap so Stephen took my place and I crawled into the nose. After a few minutes, the cold was so intense, even with multiple jackets, that I had to get back into the cockpit."

The flight proceeded on without a

**CENTERSPREAD:** **The Mitchell's camouflage is quite effective over this particular patch of terrain.**

Destination TOKYO

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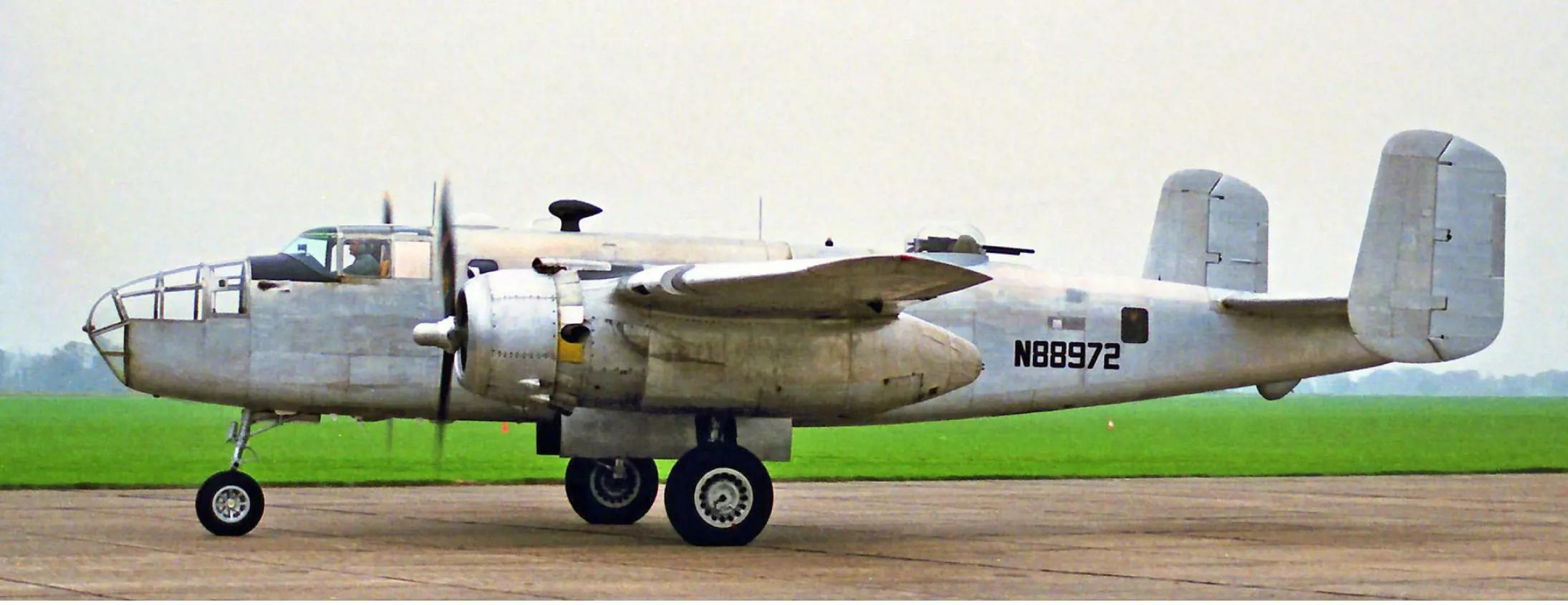


**Hoof Proudfoot and Tony Ritzman arriving at Luton, England, after the epic ferry flight.**

hitch although almost all of it was over a cloud deck. The weather was not great when the bomber got near Shannon so rather than attempting an IFR approach, a decision was made to head south for 450 miles and land at Luton, England (after an epic 9.5 hours in the air). The B-25 was greeted by Customs and they were not pleased to see the arrival of a combat aircraft bristling with machine guns.

During the flight, John Crocker was extremely nervous and several times wanted to discontinue the mission. “John apparently had a well-paying movie job flying a PBY back in Oakland, California, and he wanted to get on an airliner and head back following our first delay. However, Stephen pointed out that John had signed a contract to complete the flight. As soon as we landed at Luton, John was out of the B-25 and headed to Heathrow where he caught a flight back to California,” said Tony.

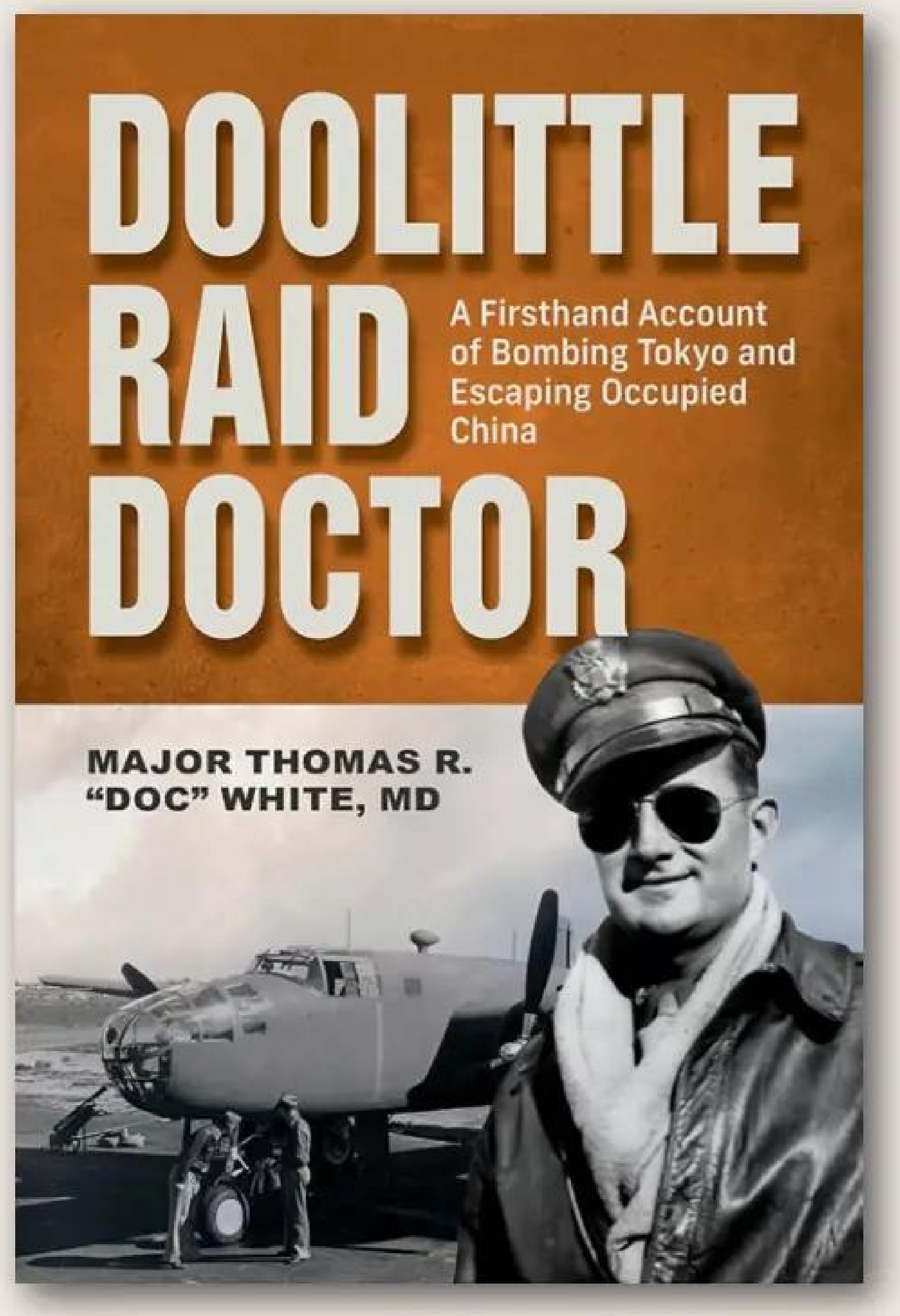
“We spent the night at Luton and the next morning Hoof Proudfoot replaced John in the left seat for the half-hour flight to Duxford. I don’t think Hoof had ever flown a B-25 but he did an absolutely perfect job and I was extremely impressed. Once we got to Duxford, Stephen treated me to a tour of the airfield and Cambridge. The next day I was on a 747 and heading home. I learned a couple things on this flight and one was to become very involved in the planning stage of any such mission. The second was to never trust anyone but yourself.”

Two years later, ferry pilot Doug Parkins would disappear without a trace while flying a light aircraft across the Atlantic. On 5 February 1996, John Crocker would attempt to takeoff from Saint Johns, Arizona, in an overloaded Convair C-131 registered N131T whose ADI system was inoperative. The aircraft was operating under a ferry permit that did not allow for the carriage of cargo or passengers but the plane was packed with cargo along with two passengers. For takeoff, an incorrect flap setting was used. The Convair used every inch of runway and did not gain altitude. It really did not get out of ground effect and began hitting objects in its path before crashing near the town, killing all four aboard.

## NEW BOOK ON THE RAID

After the passage of over eight decades, new material on the Doolittle Raid is not easy to come by. However, there is a new book that does shed a lot of light on the raid via a previously unpublished manuscript. Coinciding with the flight of the restored Mitchell, *Doolittle Raid Doctor* by Maj. Thomas R. “Doc” White has just been published and the volume is mainly compiled from what Doc White wrote after the Raid and thus gives us a new and first-hand account of one man’s thoughts. The only flight surgeon on the raid, White also trained as a gunner and was part of the crew of aircraft #15. He wrote what would turn into a 40,000-word manuscript during and immediately after the war that gives a vivid impression of this thoughts about the attack on Japan and then the harrowing escape through China as the Raiders sought to evade murderous Japanese forces intent on their capture.

White captured what life was like aboard the *Hornet* as the ship headed for Japan through treacherous seas. The launch and flight to the target is well-depicted as is the ditching after running out of fuel. As a doctor, White tried to take care of his wounded compatriots but there was nearly a complete lack of modern medical supplies in China. His description of the amputation of Ted Lawson’s (*Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*) leg highlights the importance of White’s inclusion on the mission. If not for his skill, then Lawson and some of the others would have died from their wounds.


DOOLITTLE
RAID
DOCTOR
A Firsthand Account of Bombing Tokyo and Escaping Occupied China
MAJOR THOMAS R. “DOC” WHITE, MD

***Doolittle Raider Doctor* presents a great deal of new information on the Raid.**

All-in-all, this is a very worthwhile contribution of the literature surrounding the Doolittle Raid and the book shows the heroic nature of Doc White and his fellow Raiders. Our only complaints regard the contributions of the two co-compilers of the manuscript. They have included some unnecessary material and photos and then do a lot of hand-wringing about the American “hateful racial stereotypes” of the Japanese. Get over it.

This new book costs $30 and is available from the Aviation Book Club by calling 818-700-6868.

### THE FIGHTER COLLECTION AND THE DUXFORD YEARS

Once at Duxford, The Fighter Collection crew got busy with the aircraft to prepare it for the upcoming airshow season. A B-25 operating in Britain and Europe was pretty much a rarity so numerous bookings were made. Also, the B-25 would serve as an excellent transport to support TFC's single-engine fighter operations.

The B-25 received an accurate WWII RAF paint scheme along with the name *Grumpy* on the left side of the nose while a large TFC insignia was placed on the right. It also received the British civil registration G-BYDR.

The Fighter Collection operated the plane until early 2002 when it received an American certificate of airworthiness along with the registration of N25644. The reason for the change? *Grumpy* had caught the eye of collector Paul Allen and a deal was made with Grey. The plane was flown to nearby North Weald and put into a hangar where it sat, and then sat some more. In the meantime, Paul Allen acquired a B-25J that was being restored back to WWII configuration by Aero Trader.

In 2009, there was another change in ownership when the hangared bomber was purchased by John Sessions for his expanding Historic Flight Foundation. Then there was another epic transatlantic cross and the plane headed to its new home at Paine Field in Everett, Washington. At this location, the aircraft was flown numerous times for airshow work. Sessions decided to move his collection to Spokane and this was done in 2020. The aircraft were housed in a new multi-million-dollar hangar (built at taxpayers' expense) at Felts Field. The situation began to looks suspicious to the Feds and Sessions' dream for creating a world-class facility began to unravel as numerous illegal activities were discovered.

The entire collection was seized by authorities after Sessions was convicted of various criminal offenses and he joined the growing ranks of Warbird criminals. The whole sad affair, which quickly showed itself to be an obvious swindle in which funds from different failed enterprises were funneled into the museum, also highlighted the greed of the airport commission in using taxpayer money to construct a hanger to house the collection. The airport commission let themselves be convinced by Sessions that the construction of the hangar would bring in lots of funding through evening rentals and other activities. As so often is the case, these people escaped any sort of punishment (Sessions, besides the collapse of his empire, did not serve jail time) and the only ones really damaged were the taxpayers whose money was used to build the $5 million hangar.

FLY LOW AVIATION
Doolittle Tokyo Raiders
70th

**Soon after landing at Chino on 23 October, Brennan (left) and Doug (right) were being given a tour by Carl Scholl of the B-25B under restoration for Kermit Weeks.**

In 2023, the B-25D and the entire collection of the Historic Flight Foundation was put into receivership. At that time, Platinum Fighters was appointed by the court to act as broker for the receiver. The aircraft were then offered for sale by Platinum Fighters on the open market in July of that year.

Simon Brown from Platinum picks up the story. "Obviously, when such a group of rare aircraft hits the market there is a lot of interest," said Simon from his office in Chicago. "I immediately got a call from Hugo Mathys in Switzerland. Hugo was going to be at Oshkosh and so was I so we agreed to meet up in a few days' time. Hugo had his immaculate Douglas DC-3 on display at the event. The plane had just been completely rebuilt by Basler and that company is also based at Oshkosh. Hugo is a great guy and we went over all the details on the B-25D and after examining the paperwork, he agreed to buy the bomber subject to inspection.

"A week later, the inspection team led by Clive Edwards of the Edwards Brothers in the UK arrived at Spokane and did a very detailed pre-buy over the period of two days. It was a good plane but it needed a lot of work to bring it up to Hugo's exacting standards and before crossing the Atlantic once again. It made the most sense to have this work done in America rather than somewhere in Europe. At this point, I had built up a relationship with Jack Erickson and Jim Martinelli at the Erickson Aircraft Collection in Madras, Oregon. Over the years, Platinum had done a number of transactions with Jack involving vintage aircraft and he is just a wonderful person to work with. Also, I had known Jim Martinelli for a long time and had always been impressed by his flying and restoration skills. Jim was running the shop at the Erickson facility but so much work was coming in that a decision was made to create a separate

**OVERLEAF:** Banking away from the Texan, the fine job in recreating the camouflage and markings is displayed to advantage.

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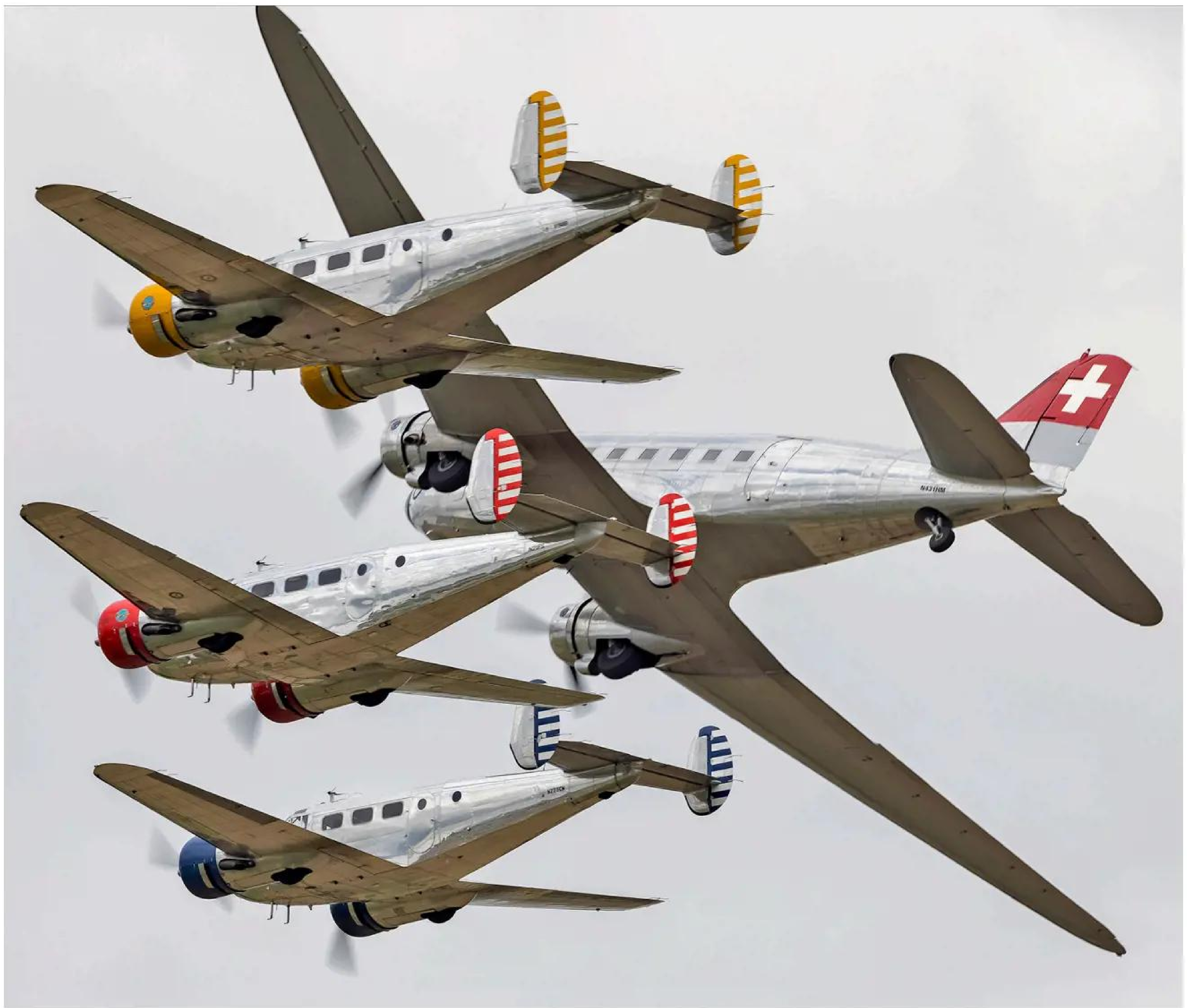
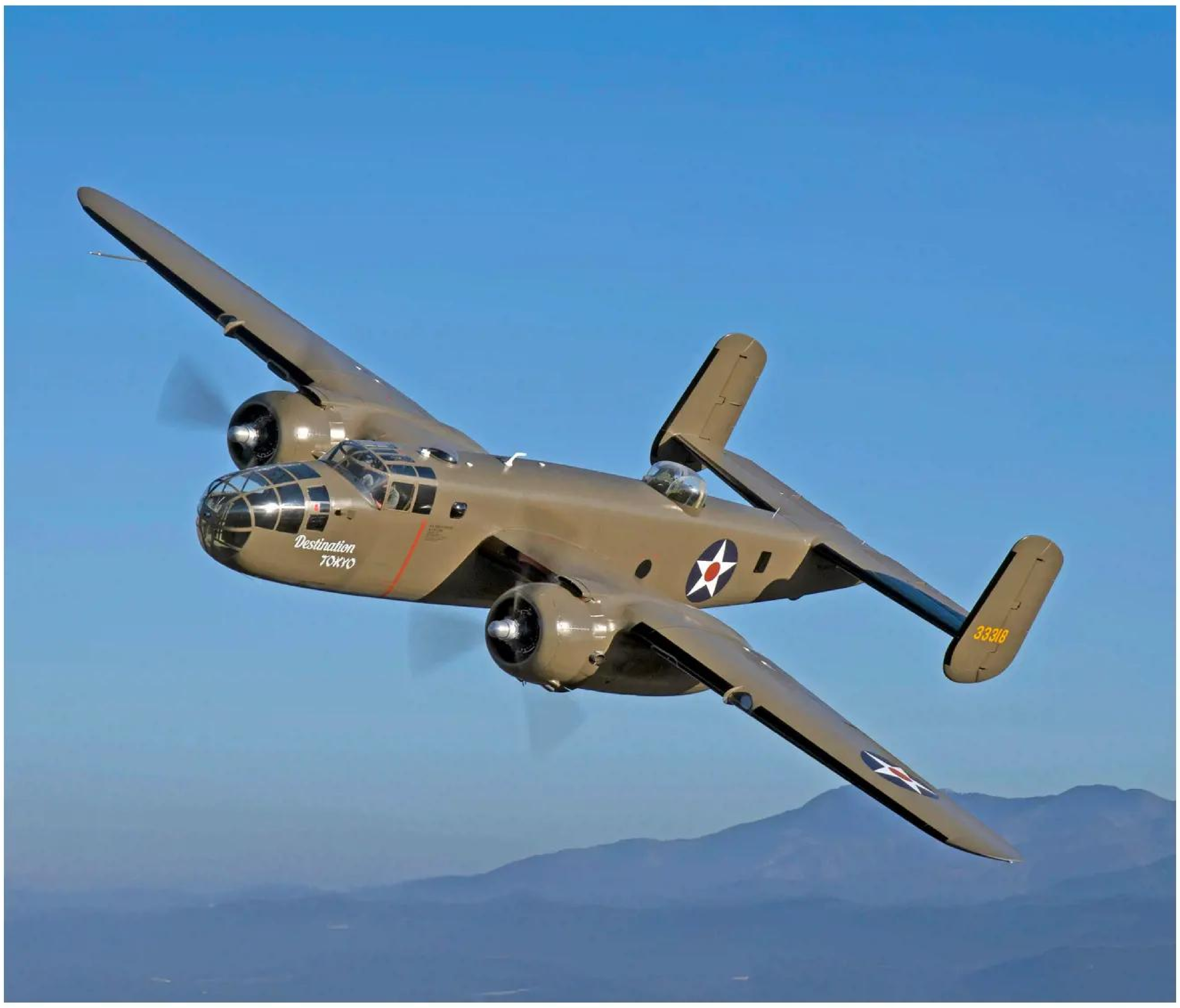
RMY



Hugo leading his demonstration team during a flight at a Swiss airshow.



Doug and Brennan bring the Mitchell in for the start of our photo flight.

branch — The Warbird Shop.

"I made the introductions and the B-25D was flown to Madras for heavy maintenance — and what would turn out to be a complete restoration. The B-25D was the first aircraft to be sold out of the ex-Historic Flight Foundation and I must say it was a real honor to work with Hugo, Jack, Jim, and all the rest of the people involved. With the B-25D sale completed, I could now concentrate on the dispersal of the rest of the collection."

## HUGO AND THE WARBIRD SHOP

Operating out of Switzerland, Hugo Mathys is the president of a family-owned medical/technical company but he also has a deep passion for vintage aircraft — especially aircraft with more than one engine. Hugo operates an enterprise called "Classic Formation" and the fleet comprises a Douglas DC-3 (N431HM, Classic 1) and three Beech Model 18s (N223CM, Classic 2; N21FS, Classic 3; N184KP, Classic 4). All aircraft are maintained in absolutely immaculate highly-polished condition and, as the name implies, Classic Formation thrills airshow crowds with precision aerial maneuvers.

Hugo has always been interested in the Doolittle Raid and has extensively studied that chapter in aviation history. With his love of multi-engine vintage aircraft and study of the Raid, he could not pass up the chance to acquire the early model Mitchell.

As we have extensively noted in the past few issues, Aero Trader/Cal Aero-Sport is now actively involved in restoring the only surviving B-25B (the variant used in the Doolittle Raid) for owner Kermit Weeks. The later B-25C/D is similar to the B-25B and Hugo decided he wanted his aircraft to be finished in a factory paint scheme representing a B. That is when Jim Martinelli contacted *Air Classics* to see if we could possibly assist in the scheme. I have known Jim for many years and have flown with him on missions involving a variety of Warbirds. Not only is Jim an extremely skilled pilot but he is also a master restorer who takes his task at returning these Warbirds to their original condition quite seriously. Along with B-25 historian Steve Whitby, we were able to supply some data on markings and paint.

"At Erickson, we had made the decision to create The Warbird Shop — an entity that is within the overall Erickson umbrella but operates as a fully-integrated restoration facility capable of handling each and every task in the process of keeping these increasingly rare aircraft flying. The Warbird Shop [TWS] is an exciting place and we are packed with all sorts of projects. TWS is expanding the field of aircraft restoration and taking the process into areas where no other shop has gone. One such project is the massive task of re-sparing the B-17 fleet. If it was not for TWS's pioneering work in this field, then there is a good chance that the B-17s would have been grounded forever," stated Jim.

"When Hugo presented us with

the B-25D, we immediately sat down and began laying out an extensive plan on what to do with the aircraft. First step was getting the plane to Madras. We went to Spokane, checked over the airframe/engines, pulled the screens, did engine runs — all the stuff you would expect to do. Mike Oliver flew the plane to Madras in September 2023, we got it into the hangar, and began opening up every panel.

"I like to call the aircraft an 'onion' — for every layer we peeled back we found more problems. Our squawk list began to grow and grow. I flew to Switzerland to have a face-to-face with Hugo. What a great person! He fully understood what we were facing. What was originally planned as a deep IRAN became something much, much more.

"With Hugo's blessing, we tore into the plane beginning on 2 January 2024. What readers need to understand is that this aircraft was built in 1943 and for many of the years since then it has been a working plane — and it was worked hard. In USAAF service, it was manhandled by student pilots and I just can imagine how many times it was slammed down hard on the La Junta runways. In RCAF service, it performed all sorts of tasks — from being used as a trainer all the way to vital missions as America and Canada created the DEW Line as a defense against possible Soviet bomber attack.

"It really worked hard in civil life as a coal duster and fire-bomber. As part of the 'onion,' we decided to take the vertical tails and horizontal tail apart. That is where we found impacted borate retardant. When a drop was made and because of the aerodynamics of the Mitchell, some of the retardant would fly back and work itself deep into the structure. Sadly, retardant is no friend of aluminum and this started some really serious corrosion.

"In the end, we blew these structures completely apart, removed all the offending parts, and replaced them with new material including new spars, ribs, and stringers. Then, the whole area was reskinned.

"We discovered that somehow the rear fuselage had become a bit 'twisted' and the logs give no indication of any form of damage so perhaps this came about from hard use as a trainer. By this point, we had broken the fuselage into sections and we got deep into the rear section, replacing longerons, stringers, and some bulkheads. Obviously, this was a complex job and when it was completed, we reskinned the entire unit [in the end, 85% of the plane would be reskinned].

**Matt Nightingale brings the T-6 directly under the Mitchell. This view shows the small tail blister to advantage.**

"The forward section of the fuselage received the same treatment. It was also reskinned and AirCorps stretched the skins for us — I would like to say that the entire Warbird industry depends, to smaller and larger degrees, on each other and that is how it should be. Even though The Warbird Shop if fully capable of completing all steps of a restoration, sometimes it is easier to subcontract certain jobs — especially when time is a factor and Hugo wanted this aircraft done as soon as possible. Aero Trader/ Cal Aero-Sport really helped out while the engines were sent out to Anderson Airmotive for overhaul.

"Retardant is heavy and when you restore a former fire-bomber, you will usually find damage in the bomb bay area. A gallon of borate retardant weighs between 8.5 and 9.5 pounds. So, you have a thousand-gallon tank full of that stuff and you have a lot of strain, especially if the B-25 is doing some heavy maneuvering in the fire zone. This caused lots of stretching and straining in the bomb bay and we completely rebuilt the area. Along with rebuilding the center section, we also put a new floor in the aircraft.

"The wings were removed and gone through. We added new leading edges, new wing tips, lots of reskinning, etc. Every control in the aircraft was rebuilt with all-new pulleys [there are 491 pulleys in a B-25!] and cables. The control surfaces were rebuilt and repaired as needed. We replaced the right R-2600 engine mount and lots of cowling pieces — courtesy Aero Trader.

"The fact that Hugo wanted this aircraft done quickly meant we always had a crew of eight on the plane and this would sometimes go as high as 16 skilled workers. I could not have asked for a better crew and as a group they were united in building the finest B-25 possible. As you can see, the complete story of restoring this aircraft could fill a large book and perhaps it will someday. Also, every part of the plane was completely stripped of old paint so we were able to view the original aluminum up close and personal and this is what led

**OVERLEAF:** Displaying *Destination Tokyo* with the gear down.

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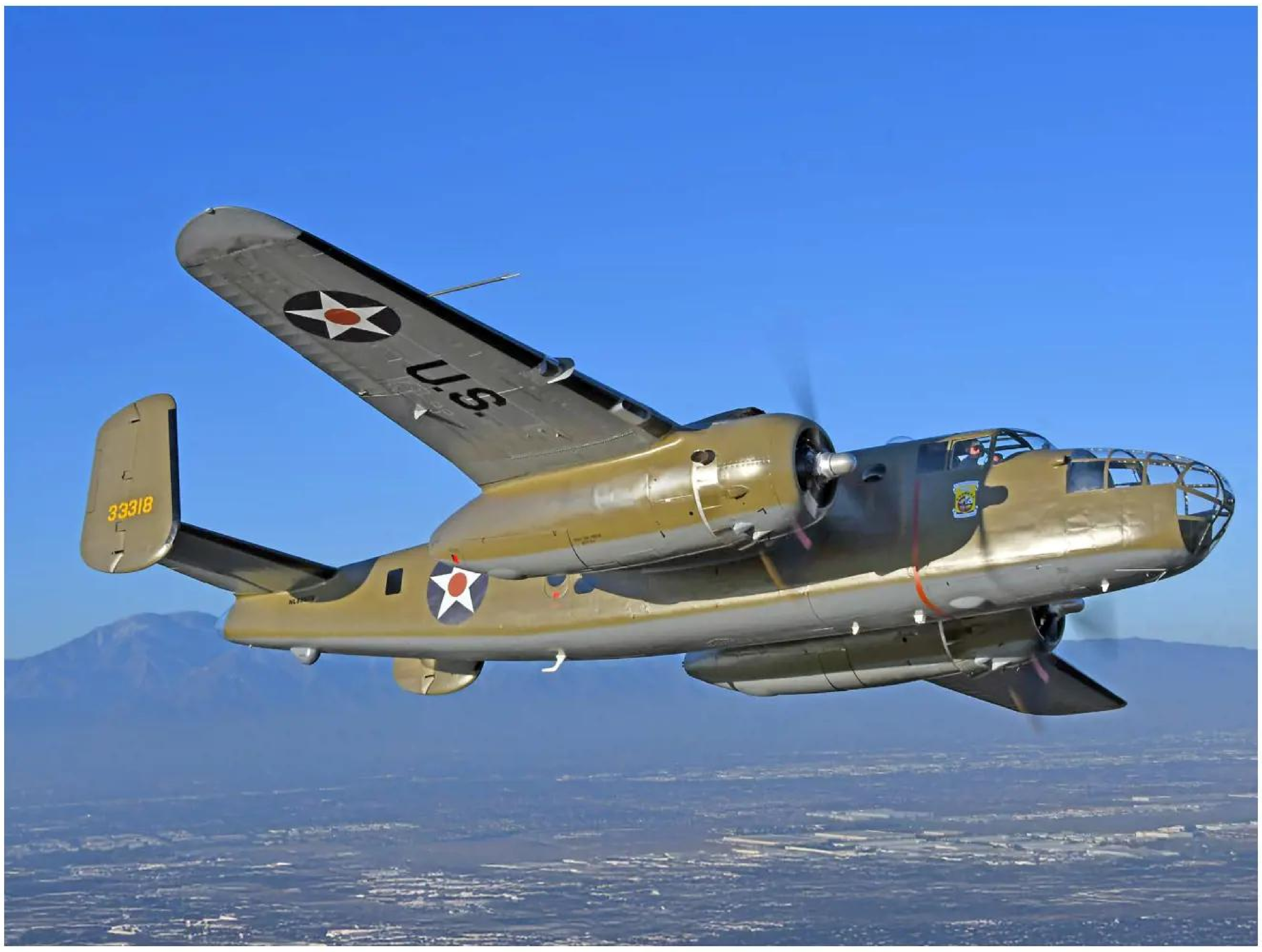


**The original factory paint and markings were faithfully recreated by ArtCraft at Santa Maria Public Airport.**

to replacing so much of the skin.

"Inside the bomber, we made all new placards to factory specifications and the panel, rudder pedals, control columns, were all redone and painted to factory spec. While all this was going on, Anderson completed the R-2600s and when they arrived at Madras, they were gleaming works of art.

"We hung the engines and the first run was on 31 May 2025. In those final few months, everything really started coming together as completed components were mounted on the airframe. The big day came on 16 June 2025 when John Maloney and Dan Vance strapped into the cockpit and took the bomber on its first post-restoration test flight. Everything went as planned and we had completed the aircraft in an amazingly short period of time. I truly think The Warbird Shop is the only facility in the world that could have completed this task during that period. The plane is a testimonial to The Warbird Shop crew along with Hugo and his foresight in having the B-25 restored to such a high standard. The aircraft will now be capable of operating for decades to come.

"With test flying completed, the Mitchell was flown to ArtCraft Paint at Santa Maria Public Airport in California for the application of the Olive Drab/ Neutral Gray camouflage and the national markings. Getting the national markings done correctly involved some detail research and that is where Steve Whitby helped tremendously — especially getting the 'U.S. ARMY' under the wings in the correction position. Ron Kaplan applied the name and we had to get special permission from the Raiders' organization to apply the Doolittle Raiders crest on the right side below the cockpit. When it comes to the finish, I do not think it could have been done any more accurately than it what is now on the plane."

## TIME FOR THE PHOTO MISSION

As noted, the bomber was at Chino on 23 October and it had to be at Palm Springs that evening so Doug could begin crew training with Hugo and his pilots by the next day. In Matt's office, we sketched out a plan for the photo flight that would take place near the airport. By this time, word that *Destination Tokyo* was at the field had brought out a crowd of spectators and photographers.

Doug and Brennan are professionals so our briefing was just that — brief. We then headed out to the T-6 and the B-25, fired up the engines, and taxied to the run-up area. While doing so, I had some time to reflect on just how many times I had done this at Chino and with just how many Mitchells. I could not come up with an exact number but it was certainly with every Mitchell that had gone through Aero Trader along with other B-25s visiting the field. In that time period, the area had drastically changed — especially over the past few years as all the old farms have been destroyed and replaced with giant distribution centers.

After takeoff, we headed to our designated area which is one of the few bits of land not congested with houses or buildings. Doug and Brennan slid right into position and from that point, we did not use the radio — just hand signals.

In the air, *Destination Tokyo* is testimonial to the fine work undertaken by Jim Martinelli and The Warbird Shop crew. The bomber looked like it could have rolled right out of the factory as we went through our various maneuvers. After a couple orbits, Doug broke away and headed off to Palm Springs.

I talked to Doug a few times during crew training and everything went extremely well. Hugo loved his new aircraft and the guys put on plenty of time flying between Palm Springs and Thermal and by the end of the training session, the plane had 50 hours on the clock. "There was not one squawk," said Jim.

So, what are the future plans for *Destination Tokyo?* Originally, after training the aircraft was going to make another transatlantic crossing so it could position at its new home in Switzerland but Hugo had such a great time that he has decided to base the bomber in the USA for the first part of 2026. He would like to visit several more airshows and also take the plane to AirVenture 2026 at Oshkosh so that it can be displayed to the hundreds of thousands of aviation fans that visit the event. Then it will be off to Switzerland.

Hopefully, we will be able to keep reporting on the next chapters in the life of this incredible veteran. We have to offer special thanks to a lot of people for making this story happen including Jim, Doug, Brennan, Matt, Carl, Tony, Jack Erickson, Mike Oliver, and everyone at The Warbird Shop. **AC**

**FOLLOWING PAGE: Breaking away from the camera plane and heading to Palm Springs, Doug and Brennan show off the accurately recreated "U.S. ARMY" that was painted on immediate pre-war American aircraft**

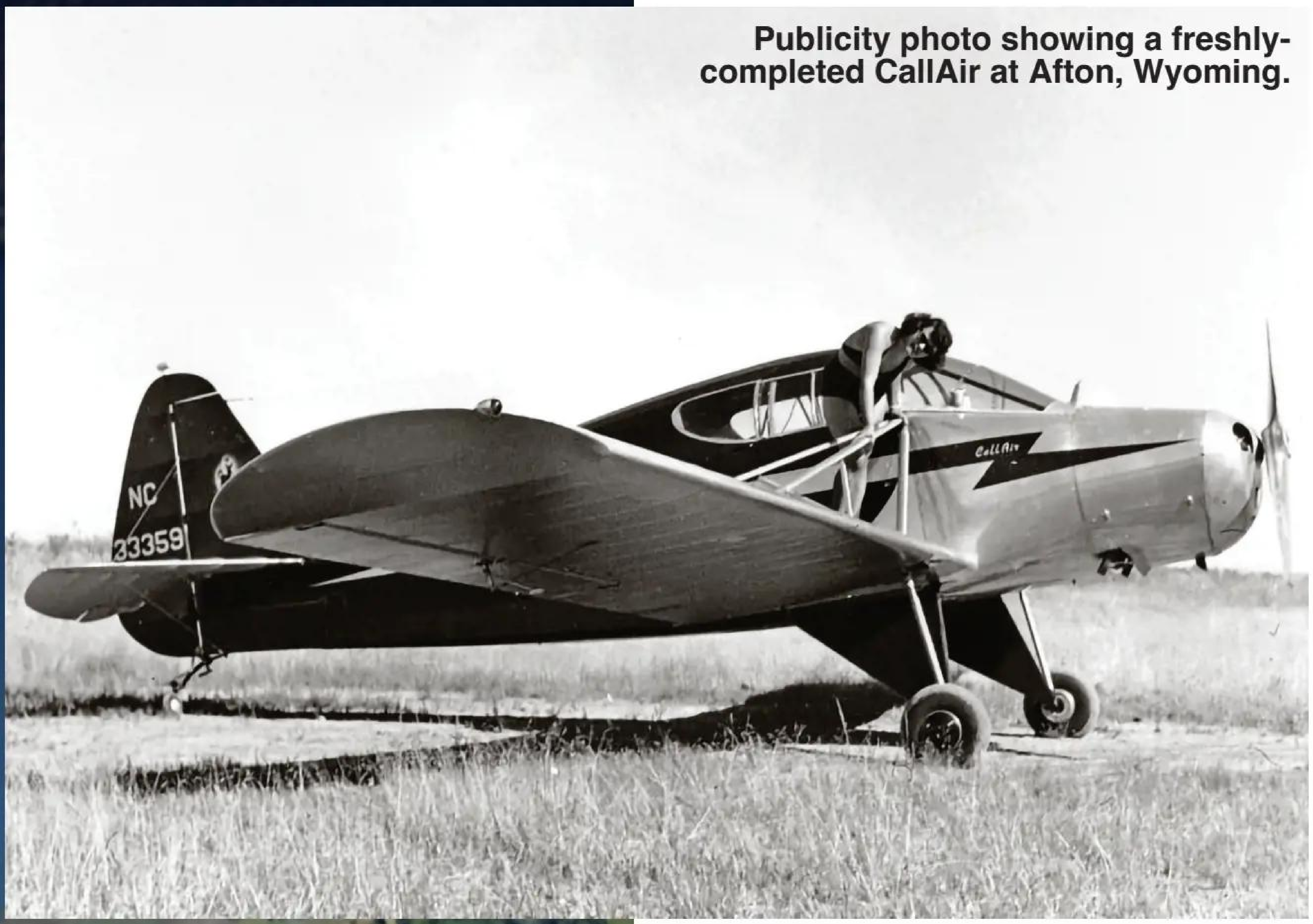
ARMY
U.S.

# HIGH-COUNTRY CALLAIR

*THIS NOW-RARE AIRCRAFT TYPE PRESERVES AN INTERESTING SEGMENT OF AMERICAN AVIATION HISTORY*

**BY ROGER CAIN**

**CallAir Model A-4 N6028C as seen from Eric Presten's PA-16 Clipper on floats.**

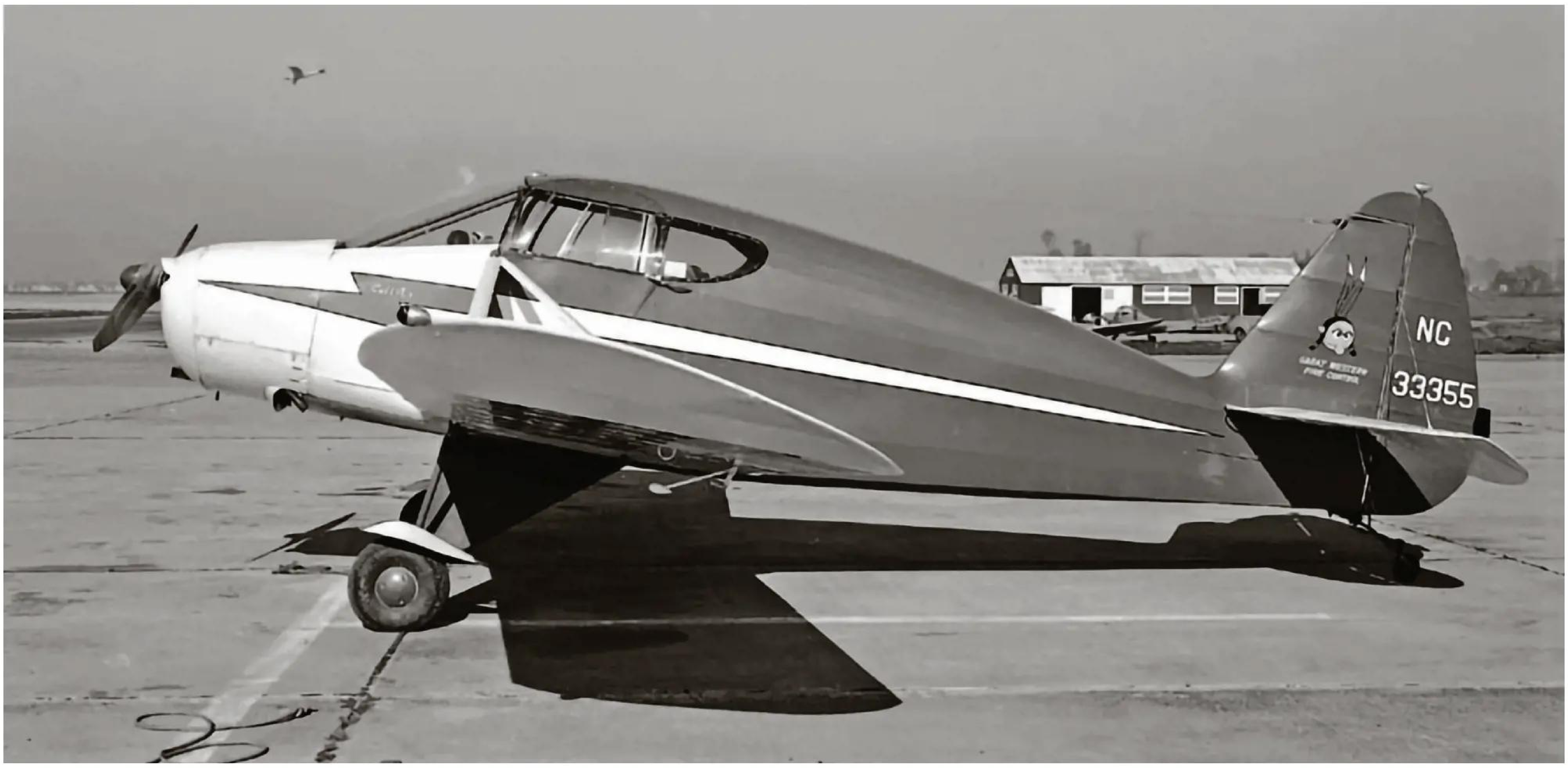


Publicity photo showing a freshly-completed CallAir at Afton, Wyoming.

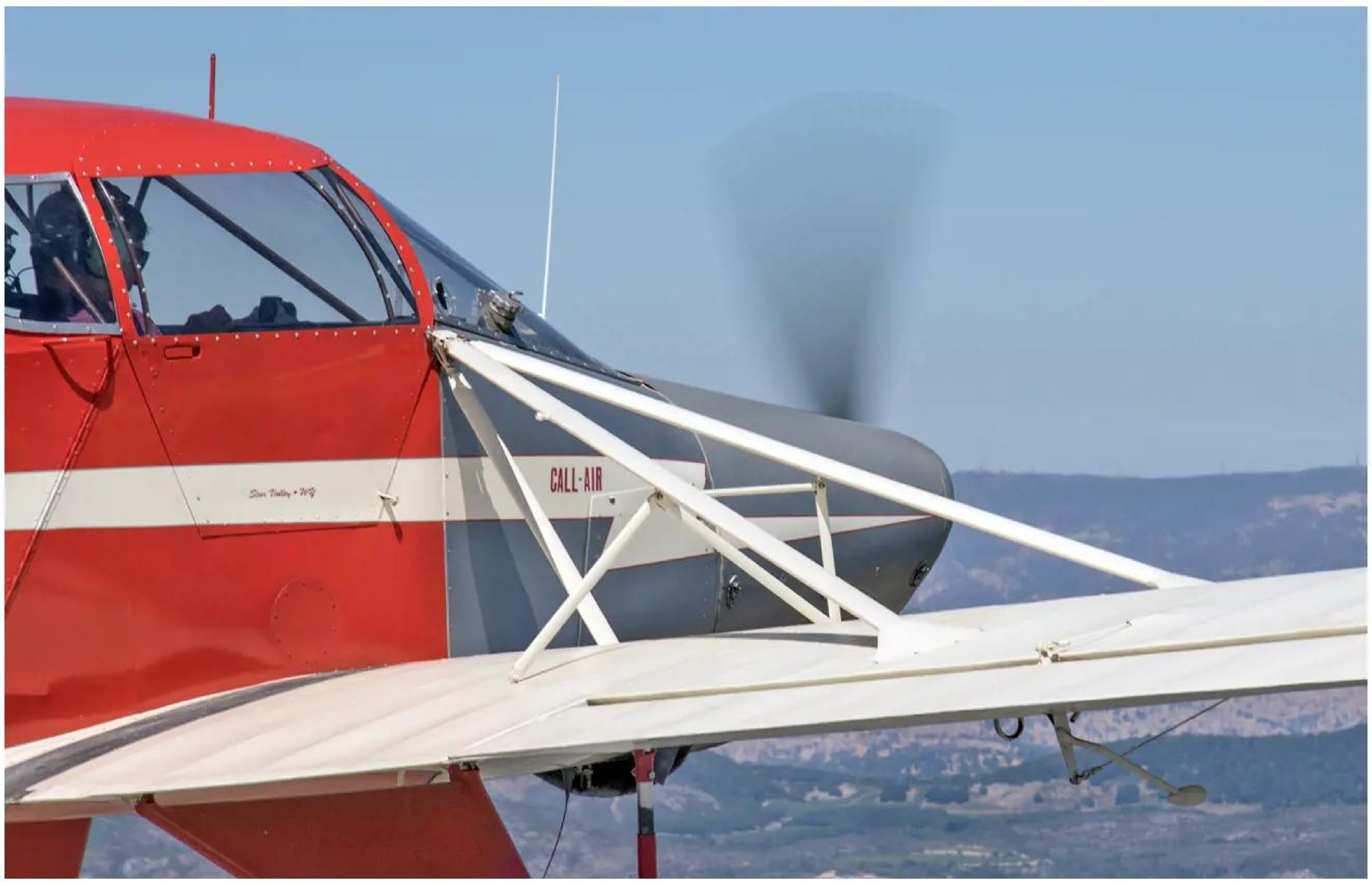
The aircraft featured in this article is not exactly common so we need to review a bit of its oft-confusing history. We have to go back to the late 1930s when Reuel T. Call was living in the high-altitude town of Afton, Wyoming. Always enamored with aviation, Reuel owned and operated a Curtiss Junior. Almost an ultralight by today's standards, the Junior was designed and built during the Great Depression to offer pilots a very low-cost method of flying. With its pusher engine pumping out barely 30 horses, the Junior had a hard time staggering into the air with passenger and pilot from Afton's air strip, which was located at an altitude of over 6000 feet in the little town of just 2000 folks.

Reuel wanted to create a practical aircraft that would be efficiently and economically flown from higher altitudes and which could also be fitted with skis for winter operation. Having learned to fly in 1930, by 1933 Reuel could afford a new Kinner Sportster and he took delivery of the plane at Glendale's Grand Central Air Terminal and flew it all the way back home — in the dead of winter.

Flying these light aircraft, Reuel got together with his brother Spencer, uncle Ivan, cousin Barlow, and friend Carl Peterson to create the CallAir Aircraft Company. The first plane had a resemblance to the Sportster but its fuselage had a more pronounced airfoil shape. It seated two or three side by



CallAir A-2 NC33355 was used as a fire spotter.



This close-up not only illustrates the extensive strut bracing but also the long sloping windscreen.

Greg and his brothers with the Clipper as children.

side and Reuel insisted the new design feature a heater. Dates vary on the first flight of the plane with one stating 1940 and another 1941.

The first CallAir (for whatever reason, Reuel wanted the two names joined in this fashion) was fitted with an 80-hp Continental A-80 and was extremely underpowered. This aircraft was an experimental workshop to try engines and other ideas. Next came the CallAir Model A-1 with a Lycoming 100-hp engine but it still did not have enough power. With the war raging, there was no way the CallAir could go into production but by late 1944, the Model A-2 was put into production under Type Certificate ATC-758 but prospective buyers were not impressed by performance so an O-290 Lycoming of 125-hp was added.

The CallAirs were distinctive looking machines with a long and graceful strut braced low wing. A very distinctive windscreen went all the way to the cowl and offered excellent forward visibility. The Model As had excellent short field, high-altitude performance and versatility was added in the fact the wheels could easily be replaced with skis. However, pilots wanted more performance and the 1947 Model A-3 had a 125-hp Continental while the 1954 Model A-4 was equipped with a Lycoming of 135-hp.

As CallAir tried to spool up into production, they had to face a battle with the glut of surplus aircraft being given away at pennies on the dollar along with new designs from Piper, Cessna, and other more established builders.

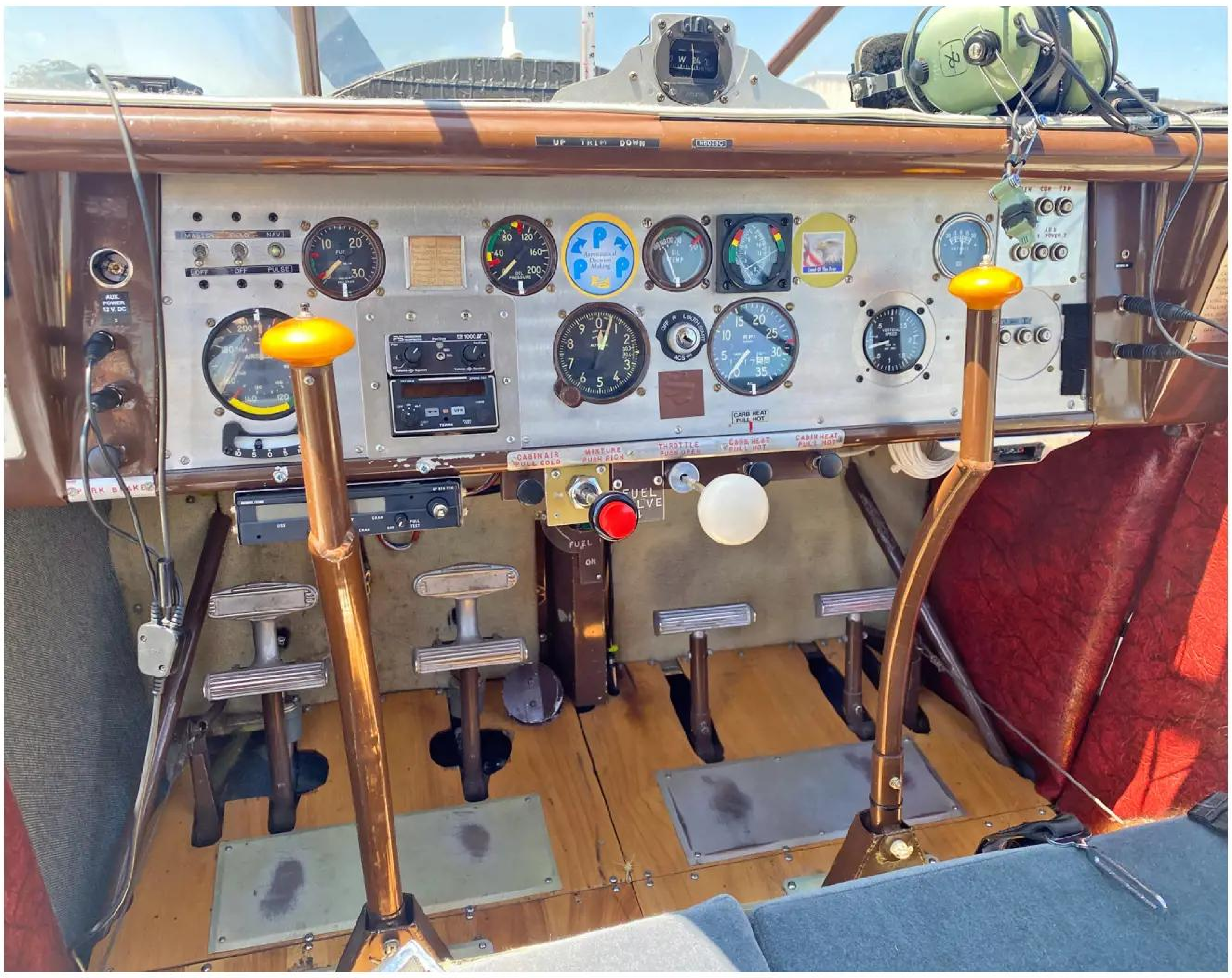
There was also a shortage of raw materials. The always frugal Reuel did not have much of a stock pile of aircraft grade spruce, steel tubing, engines, finishing materials, etc. as did other builders. When Reuel learned the established builder Interstate Aircraft was going out of business, he was able to purchase the company and its inventory at not much money. A large stock of building materials came with the purchase. Interstate had been building the Cub-like Cadet. The military also purchased the craft as the L-6. So, not only did Reuel get his building supplies, he also got the Cadet/L-6 and owners began bringing their planes to Afton for repair and refurbishment.

As business and supply and demand dictated, more CallAirs were completed. A 150-hp Lycoming was added to the design and this became the A-5. Finally, the aircraft had the power it needed. This led to a modification that saw the seating (except for the left) removed, a hopper added in its place, fuselage cut-down, and spray gear added to become the Model A-4AG, quickly changing to A-5AG. The ag aircraft started their own history and that is beyond the scope of this article but ag production continued into the 1980s.

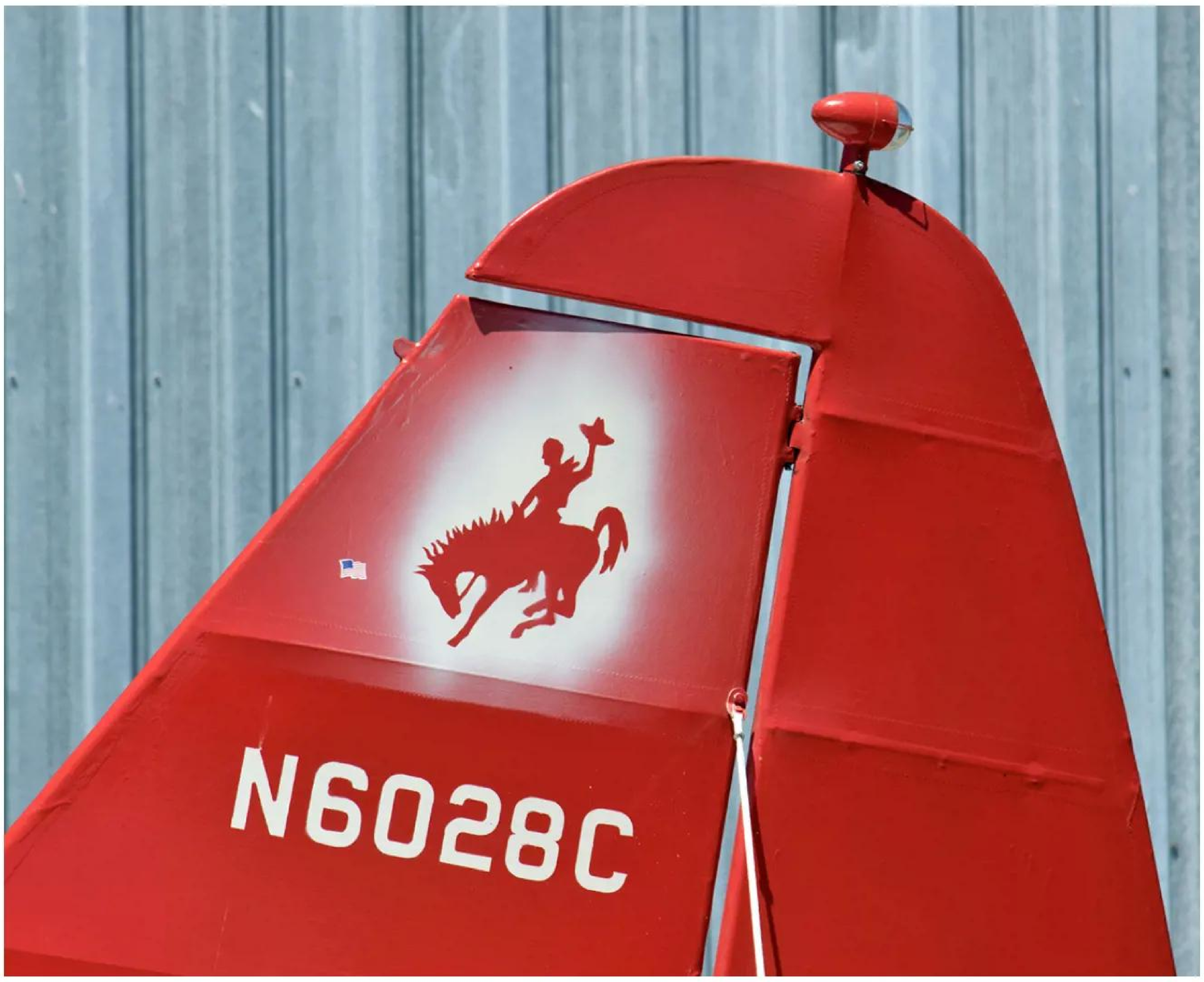
CallAir production was always limited and the following gives an indication of how many were built in the Model A series but it should not be regarded as 100% accurate: CallAir A 1; CallAir A-1 5; CallAir A-2 16; CallAir A-3 15; CallAir A-4 65; CallAir A-5 74; CallAir A-5T 9; CallAir A-6 34; CallAir A-7 1; CallAir A-9 series is unclear since production changed hands several times and the plane was built as an ag aircraft, military trainer, and drone. Ownership eventually transferred to a Mexican company and by the 1970s, the aircraft disappeared after about 150 had been built.

## GREG AND HIS CALLAIR

When an individual gets the chance to purchase the aircraft in which he learned to fly over a half-century ago, it becomes a rather unique event. This is what happened for Greg Popejoy when he learned during 2022 that a certain 1954 CallAir Model A-4 was available for purchase. Greg ended up owning the monoplane by January 2023. Powered by a Lycoming O-290-D2 putting our 135 horses, he was able to once again fly this rather rare machine, but now he is the proud owner. An aircraft most aviation enthusiasts have never heard of, Greg's CallAir was the last of the A-4s to come off the assembly line before the company changed directions and built a series of rugged single-seat CallAirs as agriculture aircraft and tow planes for gliders.



The spacious cabin can take three across and the panel is prettyvintage except for the radio.

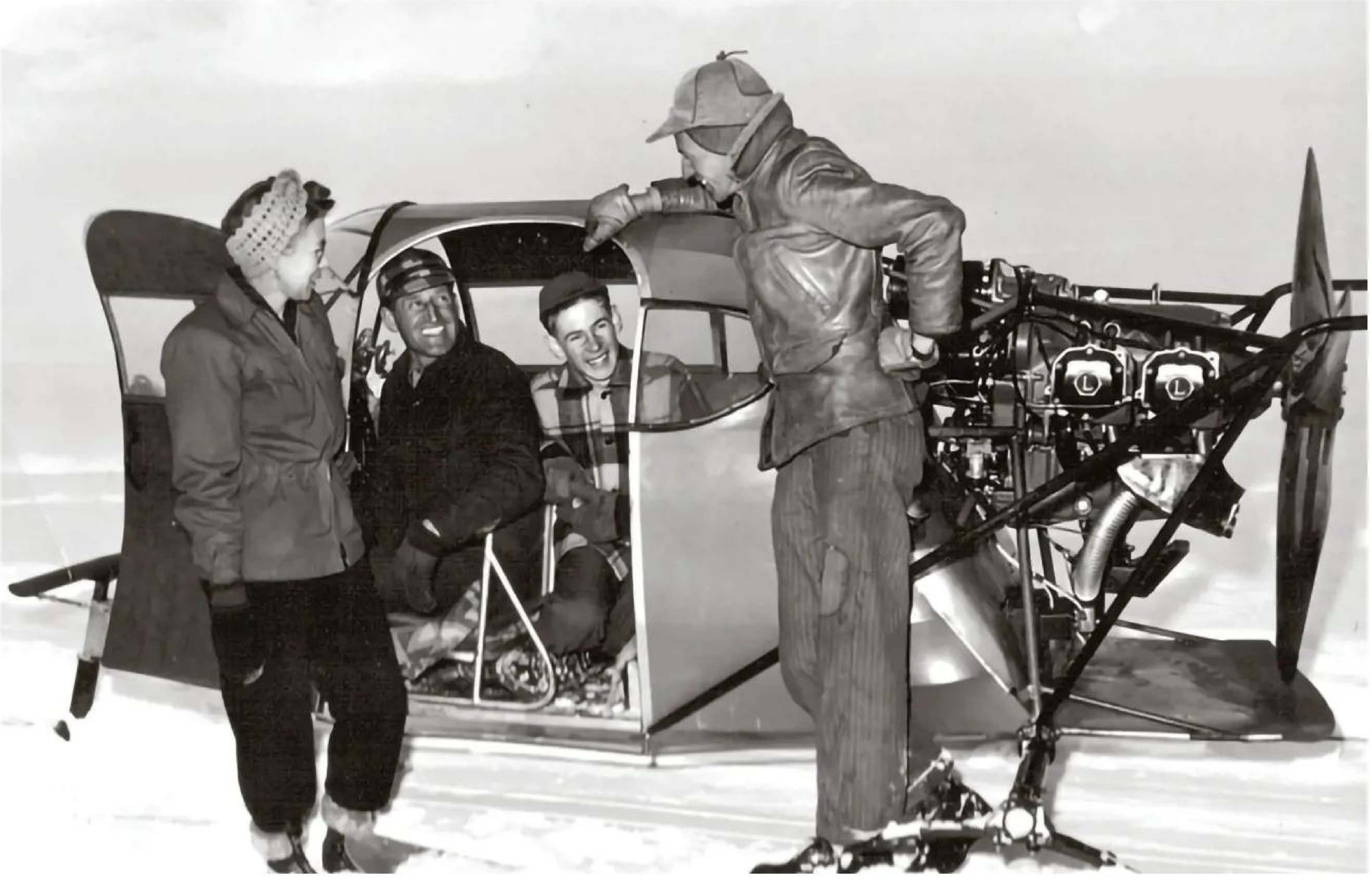


The aircraft carries the company's logo atop the vertical.

Greg's introduction to flying began in his dad's Piper PA-16 Clipper. Going aloft at age twelve, the flying took place out of Phoenix Airport in Fair Oaks, California. Like a lot of kids back then, he found himself washing and waxing the airplane, helping with

N6036C
N603

When photographed, this CallAir N6036C was looking for a good home.



When times got tight at Call Aircraft Company, the "Snow Car" was designed and built as the forerunner to the modern snowmobile.

Star Valley • WY

Greg with his pride and joy.

the maintenance, and cleaning oil off the belly — all of which allowed him some stick-time. After he got out of high school, Greg worked as a line-boy at Phoenix Airport, and developed a friendship with a young A&P named Jim Koester who worked in the shop and happened to also have a CFI license.

The Clipper was sold in the late 1960s and replaced with a Piper Tri-Pacer converted into a taildragger and fitted with a Lycoming O-320. His father wanted something with a bit more power, was faster, and had flaps but he always regretted selling the Clipper. One issue with the Pacer was that the converted gear wasn't correctly lined up and the plane would often tend to "wander" while on the ground. Greg's dad had a good friend named Bud Smith who was a United Airlines pilot and in 1971, Greg got his initial training through both Bud and Jim in the Pacer. He wound up being the only student Jim ever had, but it was Bud that signed him off for his solo and the check ride.

The next step for his father was a Pietenpol Air Camper that he bought for $1500. Built from plans, this vintage homebuilt design had been completed a few years previously by a friend. The Pietenpol was supposed to be Greg's training plane, but his dad fell in love with it and it became his own. The family also had an EAA Biplane that was built with a lot of help from friends over a ten-year period. Greg was involved with rib-stitching, painting, and a few other chores. His dad painted "Miplane" on the tail and, as far as Greg knows, no one else ever flew the homebuilt. Later on, Greg would fly the Pietenpol, and his dad would fly the EAA Biplane to fly-ins, hamburger runs, Schellville Airport dinners, etc. They still had the Piper Pacer, and Greg would fly it while has dad would take air-to-air photographs from the back seat with the back door off, some of which ended up in early *Air Classics* articles, often written in conjunction with his buddy Bob O'Hara.

Sitting at the Phoenix Airport, and appearing unused, was a CallAir Model A-4 that Greg and Jim had admired over the years. Brothers Eut and Gordon Tileston owned the CallAir, but Eut

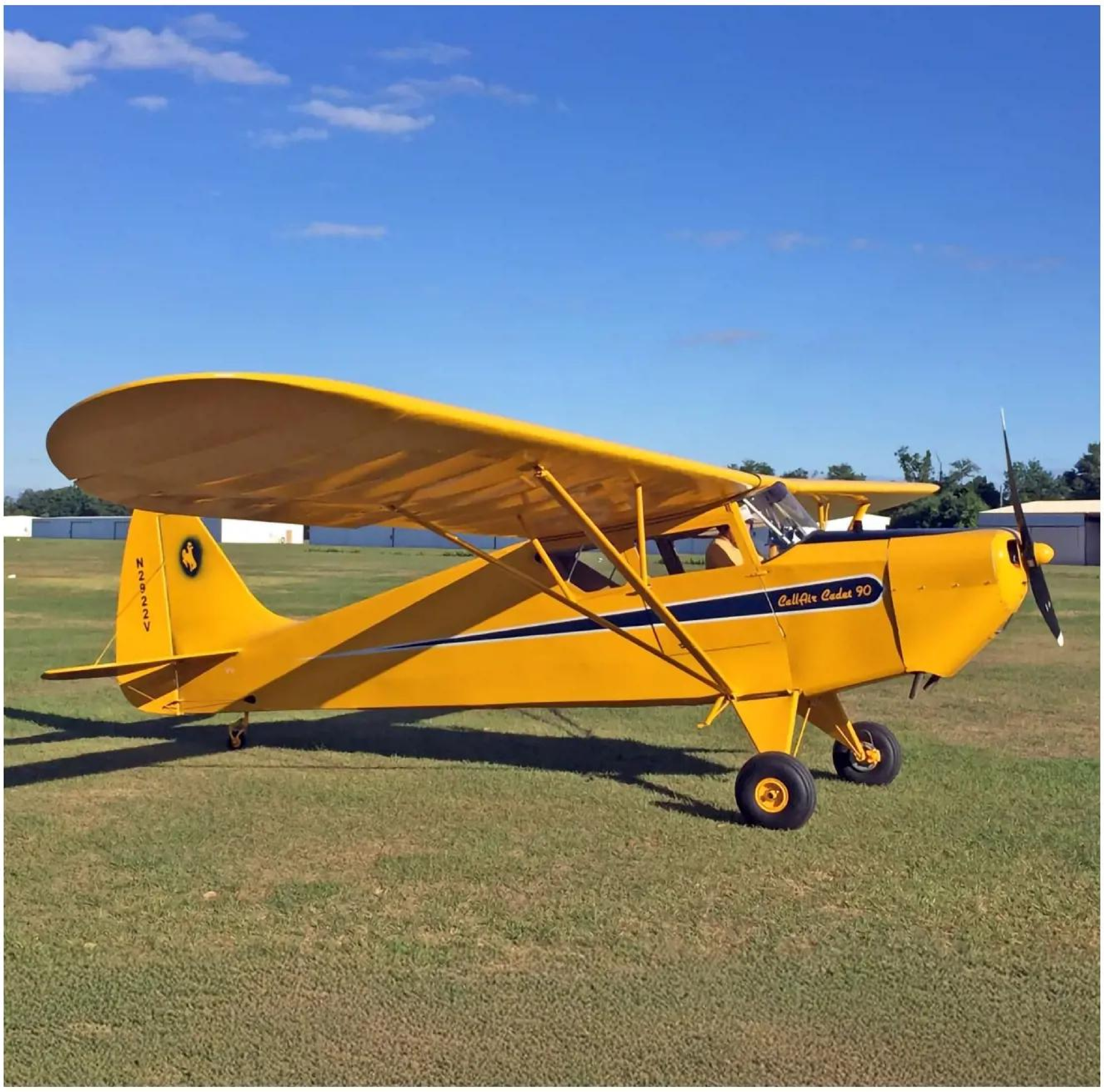
N6028C
CALL-AIR

Greg and the CallAir cruise over the northern California countryside.

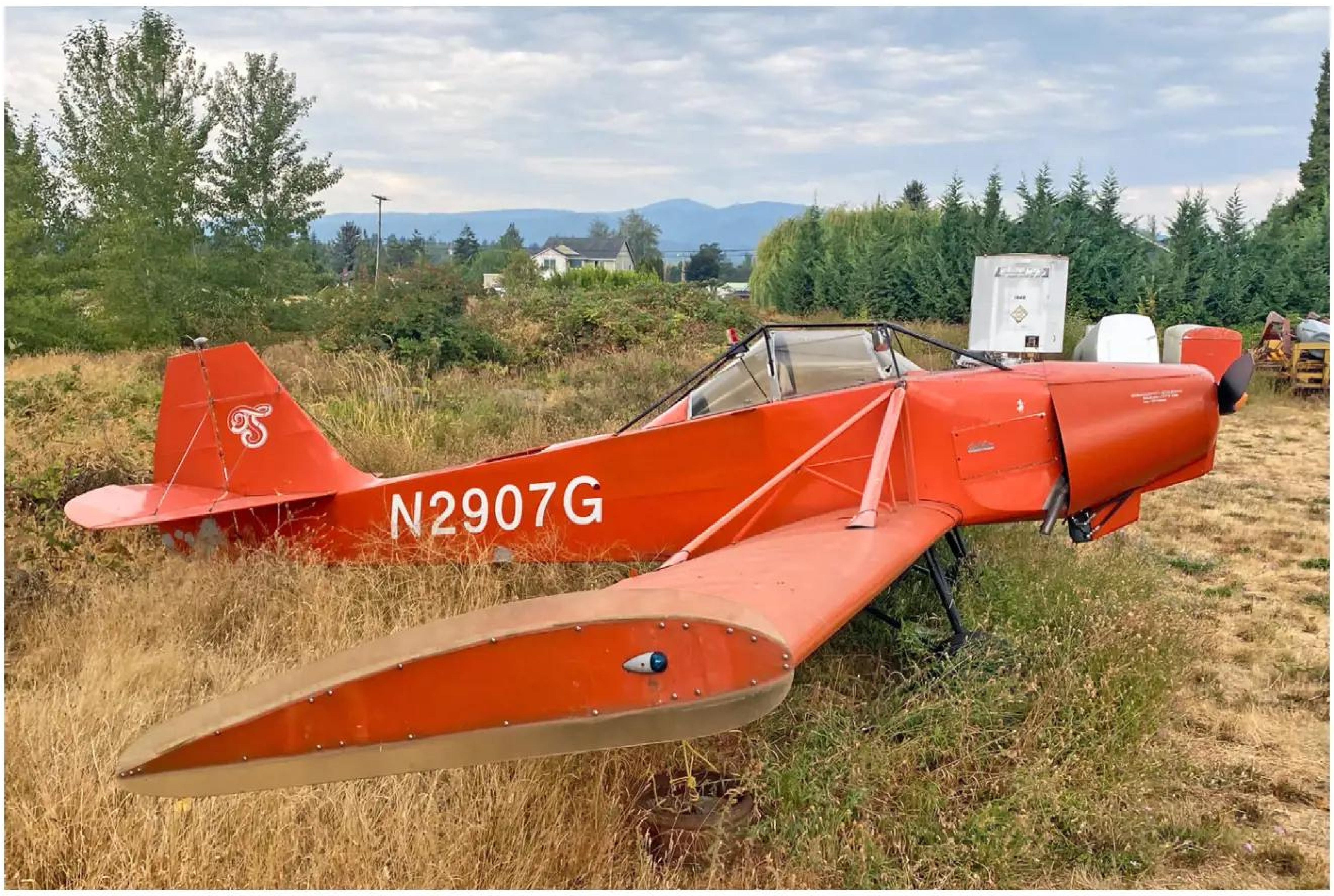
didn't really fly it much in California. Gordon still lived on the old family ranch in Colorado. Greg's dad was good friends with Eut, who lived in Sacramento.

The CallAir sat forlornly in an old wooden T-hangar at Phoenix Field and wasn't being flown. Greg asked Eut, "If we maintain and take care of the plane, can we start flying it?" A deal was quickly struck that made both parties happy. This was really the first plane Greg started getting formal instruction in, and he and Jim flew it quite a bit. At one point, he and his dad flew to Bud's place in Washington where Bud kept it at his home in South Prairie on a private grass strip. Bud used it to tow his glider and even mounted the skis on the CallAir so he could land on the side of Mt. Rainier. When Bud took ill, Greg and his dad went to see Bud, and flew the CallAir back down to Sacramento.

In 1973, Greg joined the Army and went through helicopter flight school at Fort Rucker in Alabama. Home on leave, he was out at the airport visiting with his dad and Eut when they asked Greg if he'd like to ferry the CallAir to



Call Air purchased the assets of Interstate Aircraft Company to obtain vital building materials. They also got the rights to the Interstate Cadet and started production but only one example was completed.



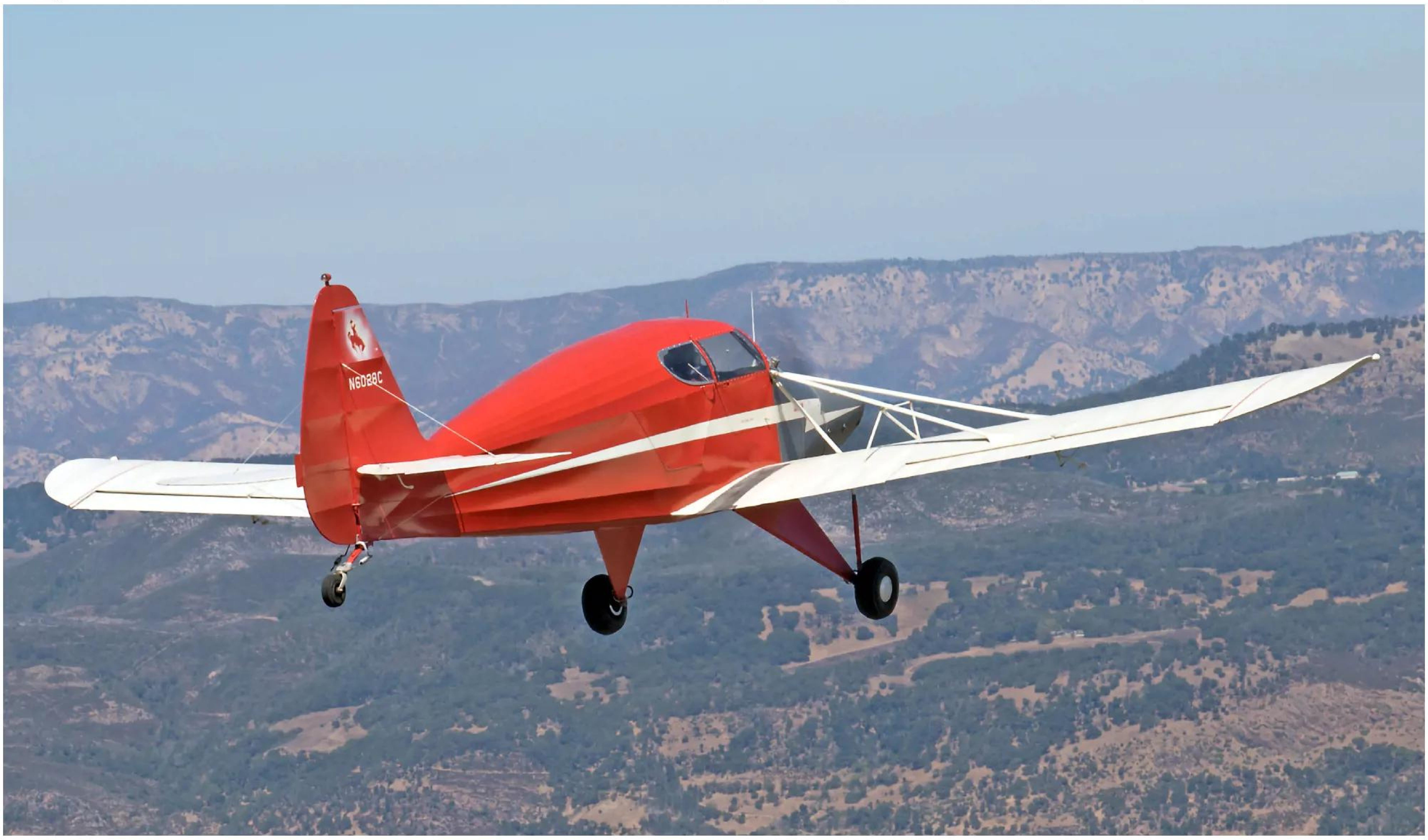
The author found this CallAir A-5 ag plane in the weeds at a Oregon airport.

Colorado. Eut's brother Gordon said it was "his turn to have the airplane, since Eut wasn't really flying it." Greg really didn't want to see it go but, reluctantly, agreed and flew it in 1974 to the brother's home at the Mesa View Ranch strip in Craig, Colorado. The CallAir ended up just sitting since Gordon had a Piper Cherokee he flew regularly.

Eventually, the CallAir was sold and went through several owners, at one point winding up in the capable hands of Bill Anderson who restored it along with a CallAir Model A-2 (built in 1949). The next owner was Wyoming Senator Boyd Eddins, who had the CallAir for around a dozen years. After that, it was with the CallAir Museum in Afton, Wyoming. Greg had been keeping track of the airplane and had talked to a few of the owners along the way to see how the old girl was doing. Several years ago, Greg called John Bagley of Rexburg, Idaho, and they began a dialogue that revealed the airplane might become available to "someone who will love and fly it." John has his own Legacy of Flight Museum and is related to the CallAir's creator. John was worried about what would happen to the CallAir and realized Greg would be the individual to look after it.

A deal was eventually struck, and the CallAir was re-united with its biggest fan. Other than a radio, there is nothing modern on the panel and Greg flew it back to California in 2023 the same way he'd flown it East a half-century before. The flight was all old-school — a simple air chart, following roads, rivers, and railroad tracks back over the Eastern Sierra.

After serving his time flying TH-55 Osages and UH-1 Hueys for the Army, Greg continued flying almost 30 different aircraft over the years, and received the FAA's Wright Brothers' Master Pilot Award, which is given to pilots who have been flying for 50 years and who have practiced safe flight operations. His CallAir A-4 only has 1100 easy hours on it and wears an original factory red paint scheme. One of the unique features of these high-altitude utility aircraft is the three-across bench seat configuration and N6028C is now at Yolo County Airport in the EAA hangar. Future plans are to put a pair of mud fenders on the CallAir. Greg has one and if you have another one sitting around, please let us know. **AC**



Greg knows that by keeping his A-4 airworthy, he will be preserving an interesting part of light aviation.

**NEW "HANGAR FIND!"**

**"THE BEST BOOK ON WARBIRD AVIATION THAT I HAVE EVER READ."**
GENERAL BUD ANDERSON

# SO I BOUGHT AN AIR FORCE

SO I BOUGHT AN
AIR FORCE
THE TRUE STORY OF A GRITTY MIDWESTERNER IN SOMOZA'S NICARAGUA
W.W. MARTIN

Will Martin describes what it was like to literally go out and "buy an air force." Will saw an opportunity in the country of Nicaragua and that opportunity was the chance to purchase the nation's air force of North American P-51 Mustangs and Republic P-47 Thunderbolts.

**SO I BOUGHT AN AIR FORCE** is the story of how an individual dealt with one of Latin America's most dangerous dictators in order to return a treasure trove of Warbirds back to the United States.

It wasn't easy. There was lots of wheeling and dealing, getting the planes ready for the long flight, several crashes, but in the end Will achieved his goal and got the majority of these WWII veterans returned to the nation that made them.

**SO I BOUGHT AN AIR FORCE** has long been out of print. However, a new "hangar find" has uncovered several boxes of the first edition of this important book on Warbird history. These mint copies are the "last of the line!"

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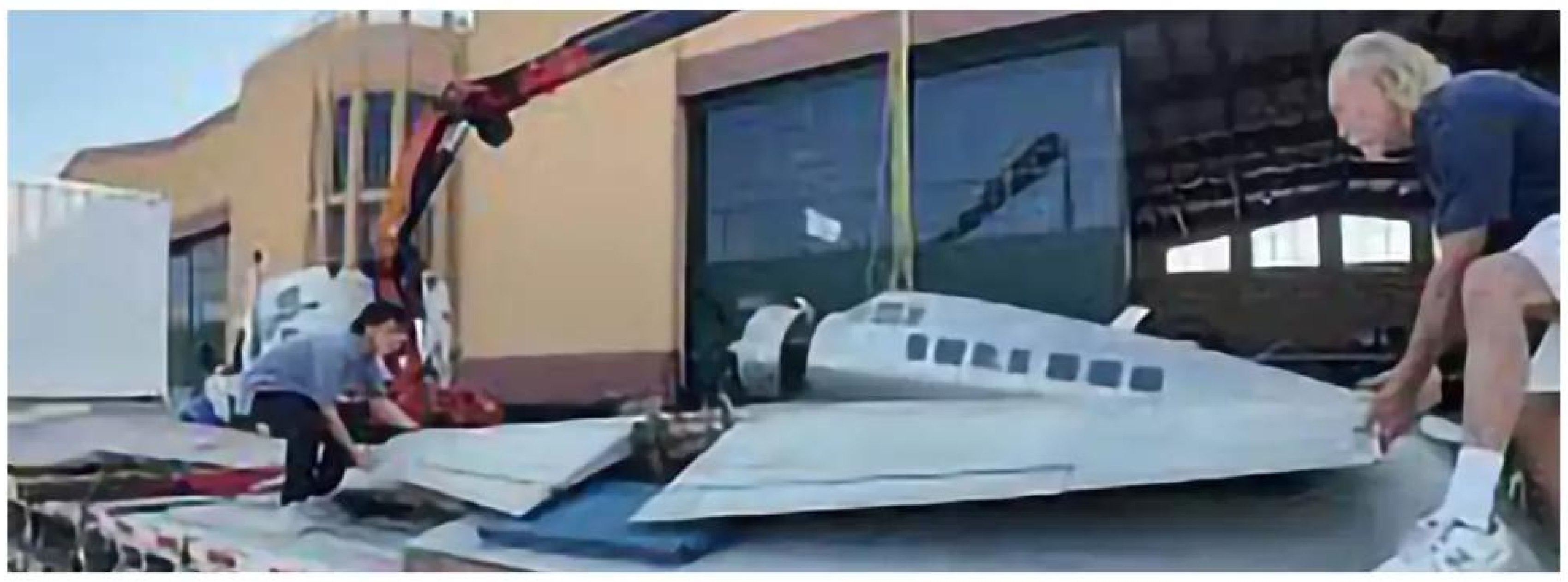
*(continued from page 14)*

Ground-breaking for the new hangar.



Kermit is busily acquiring more aircraft and one of the most recent is the ultra-rare Northrop Delta — the only 1930s Northrop capable of flight. Kermit is seen unloading components of the plane following its arrival at Fantasy of Flight.

## FANTASY OF FLIGHT UPDATE

Always moving forward, Kermit Weeks has begun what he calls the first step leading to "ACT III" at Fantasy of Flight in Polk City, Florida. This initial step is the next Museum Lite Hangar and ground-breaking ceremonies took place during early in November. Kermit states, "We had a good turnout with about 100 people in attendance. This location will be the site of the next hangar, which has always been envisioned for the future. The existing Museum Lite hangar and gift shop building were really part of ACT II to move our aircraft maintenance operations across the runway, allowing us to open both hangars of the original facility to the public.

"The new hangar will be a mirror image of our existing Museum Lite hangar and will double the size of our existing aircraft offering. I plan to meet soon with our construction team about the NEXT building addition for ACT III." Kermit has some huge plans for his attraction and the new hangar will join with the first to become the attraction's maintenance/restoration facility. After several stops and starts, design plans are moving ahead for ACT III and that act will be the big one. We will be having an interview with Kermit in an upcoming issue on his plans for the future.

JUNKYARD JETS

FINAL FLIGHTS OF AMERICA'S CLASSIC JETLINER FLEET
Hundreds of brilliant color photographs highlight the destruction of once-great jet airliners as they are turned from sleek flying machines into piles of scrap.

One of the few books to record the demise of these amazing flying machines, JUNKYARD JETS by James Douglas Scroggins III and Nicholas A. Veronico takes the reader step-by-step as these once grand aircraft are salvaged for anything valuable before being torn apart for scrap aluminum. There are also chapters on how some of these jetliners have been recycled for use in Hollywood movies!

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**Peter Arnold began collecting Spitfires long before it became fashionable.**

## PETER ARNOLD

Peter Arnold, the world's acknowledged expert on Supermarine Spitfires and occasional *Air Classics* contributor, passed away on 10 October. Arnold knew more about surviving Spitfires/Seafires that anyone else and he traveled to every one of the 260+ surviving examples spread around the world. He only missed one aircraft that that was Seafire Mk. XV PR422 at Melketia Air Force Base in the hostile nation of Myanmar. Peter was extremely generous with his knowledge of the aircraft and aided many restoration projects around the world. During his research, he accumulated what is surely the world's largest Spitfire photographic collection. Peter was the type of historian that sadly seems to be disappearing from the aviation world with no qualified individuals to take their place.

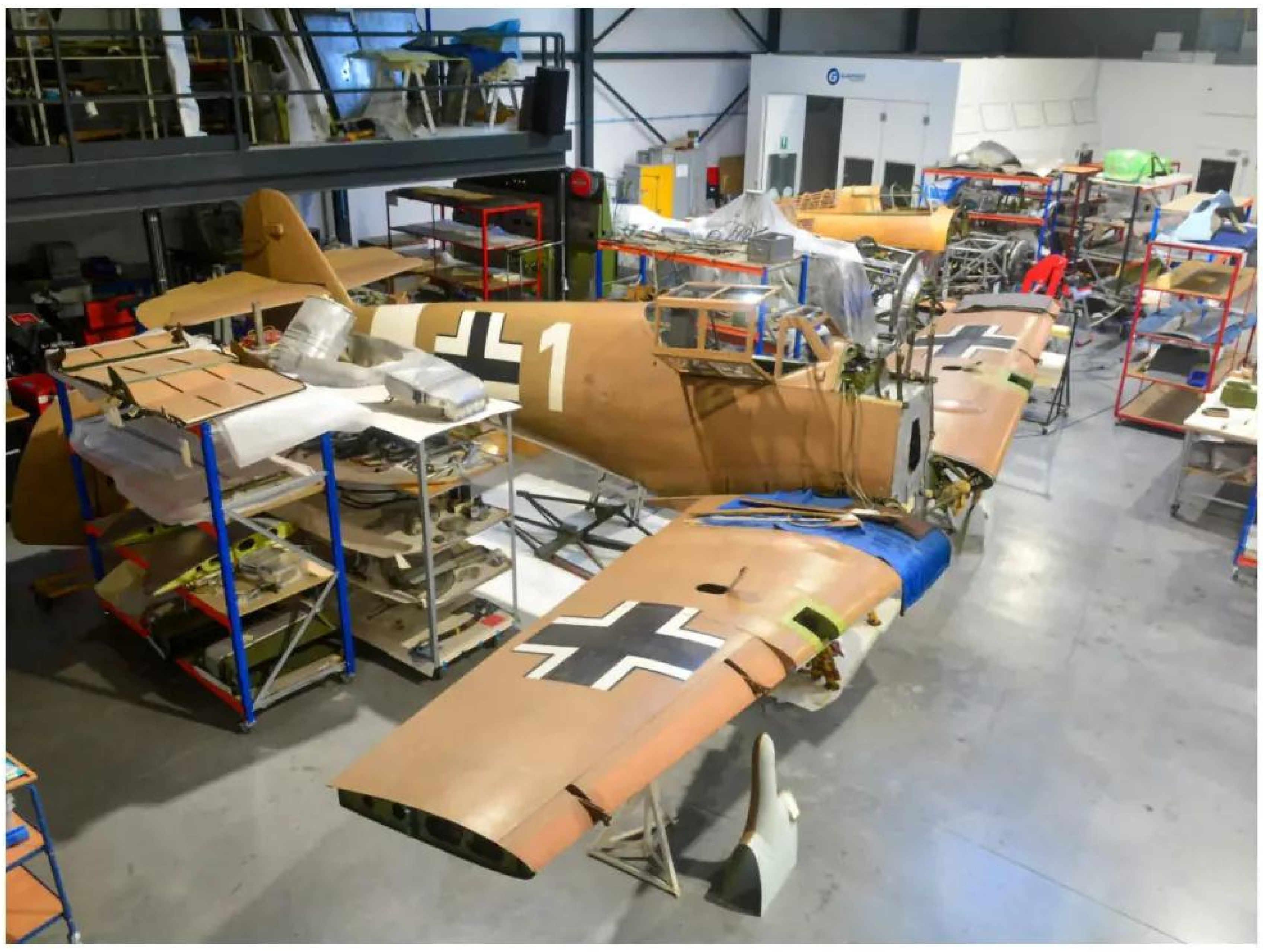
**Arnold with one of the several Spitfire projects that he has owned.**

**Smoldering remains of AN-2R 9S-GZP after crashing in the Congo.**

## ANTONOV(S) OF THE MONTH

Accidents with the vintage fleet of Antonov An-2 Colt biplanes keep continuing. An-2R 9S-GZP crashed into a forest near Kisangani, Democratic Republic of the Congo on 21 August. All seven aboard were killed. On 3 October, AN-2P RA-70350 went down near Tanzybei, Russia, while on a survey flight. The crew of two was killed in the crash which took place in extremely poor weather.

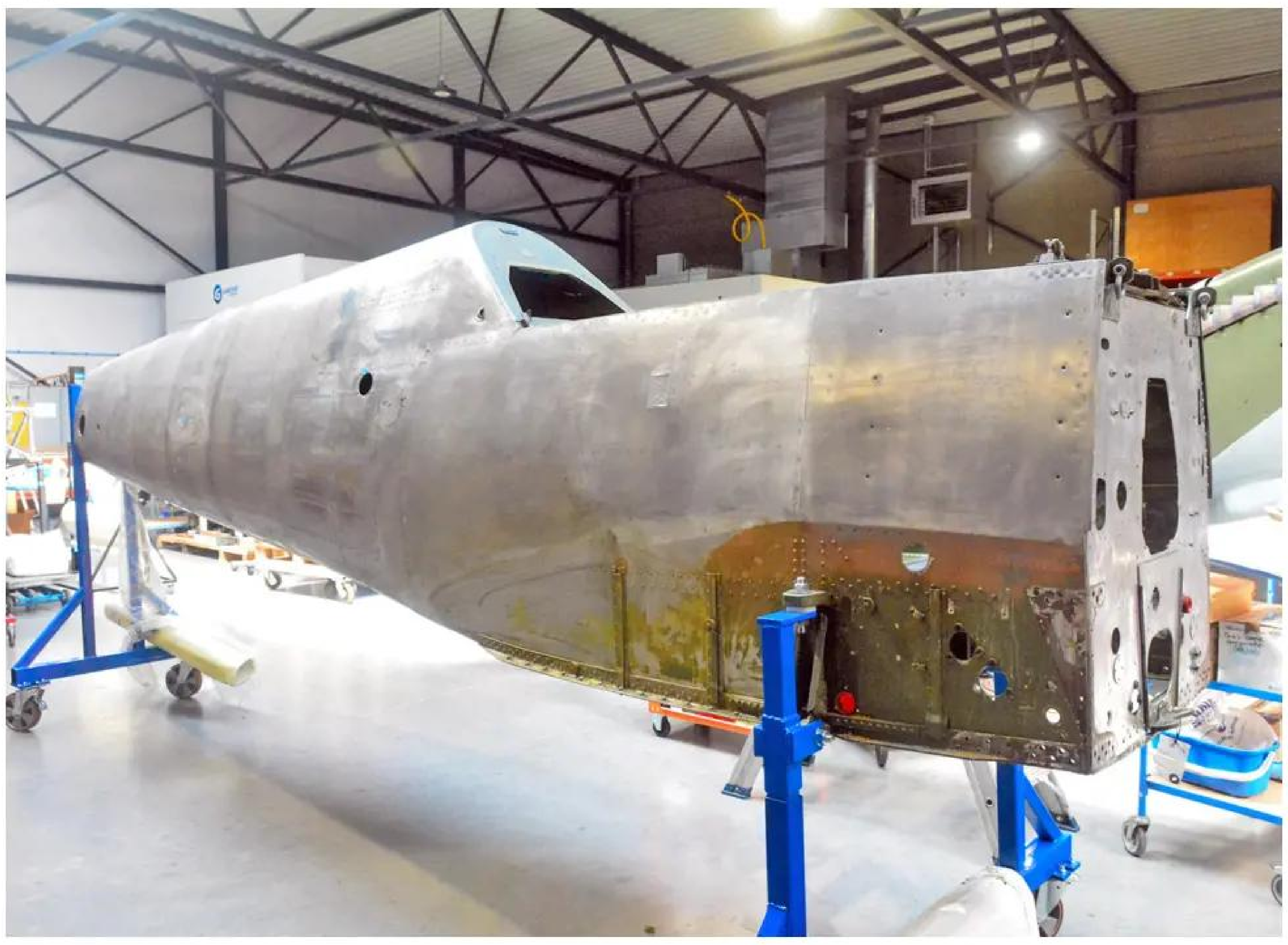
**An-2P RA-70350 was destroyed in a Russian crash.**



**The *Buchon* prior to paint stripping.**

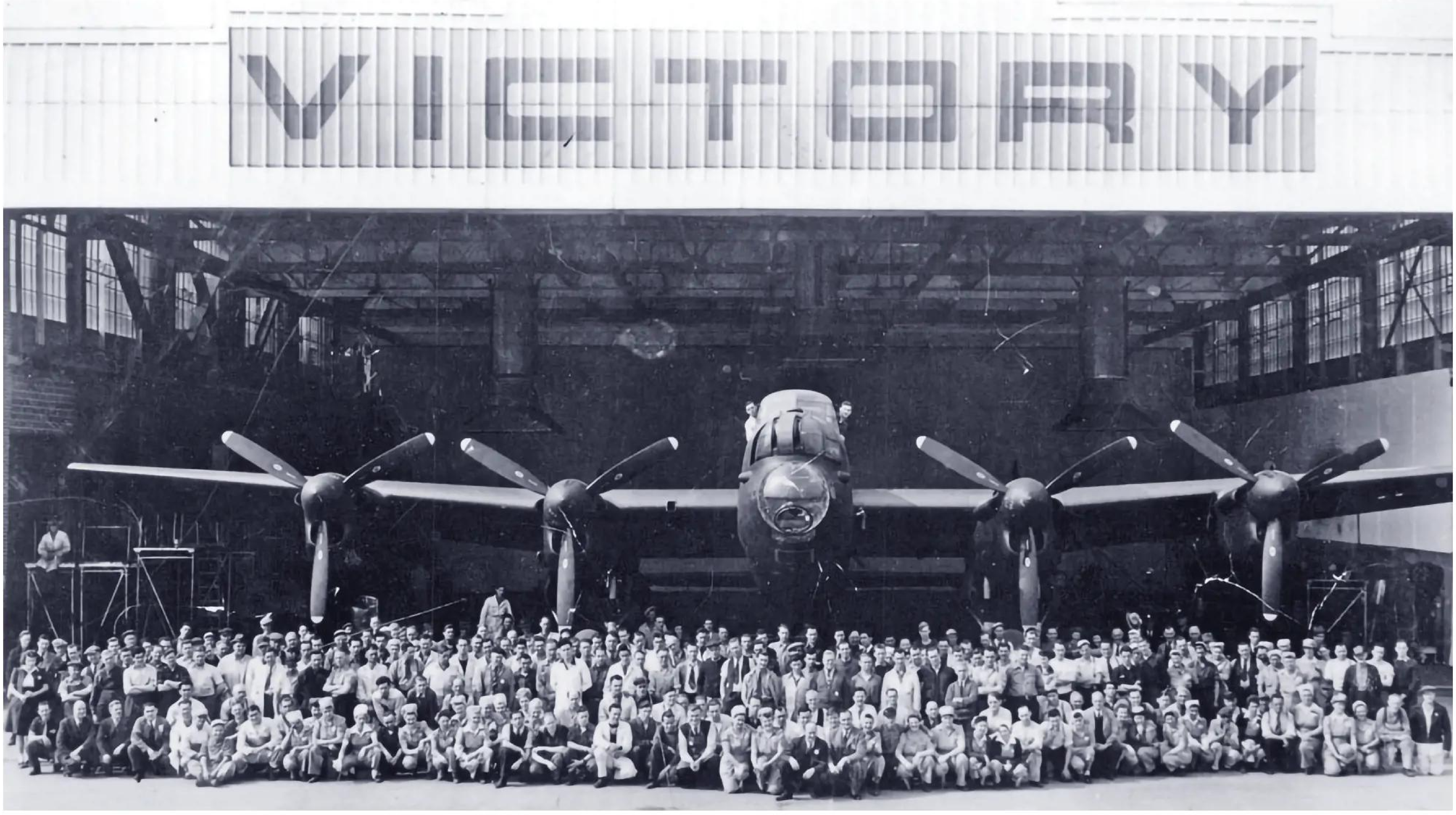
## FLYING LEGENDS HISPANO

Work is on-going at FAST Aero in Belgium on the restoration of Flying Legends Hispano HA-1112-M1L *Buchon*. The aircraft has been stripped of its previous tropical paint scheme and the Rolls-Royce Merlin 500 that came with the project is now being overhauled by Vintage V-12s. The four-blade propeller will be replaced with a three-blade unit to bring it closer in appearance to a Bf 109G. **AC**



**Devoid of paint, work is underway on the fuselage.**

(continued from page 38)



***Ruhr Express* emerges from the Victory factory.**

to get production models to the combat fronts in the least amount of time. It would rapidly grow in size.

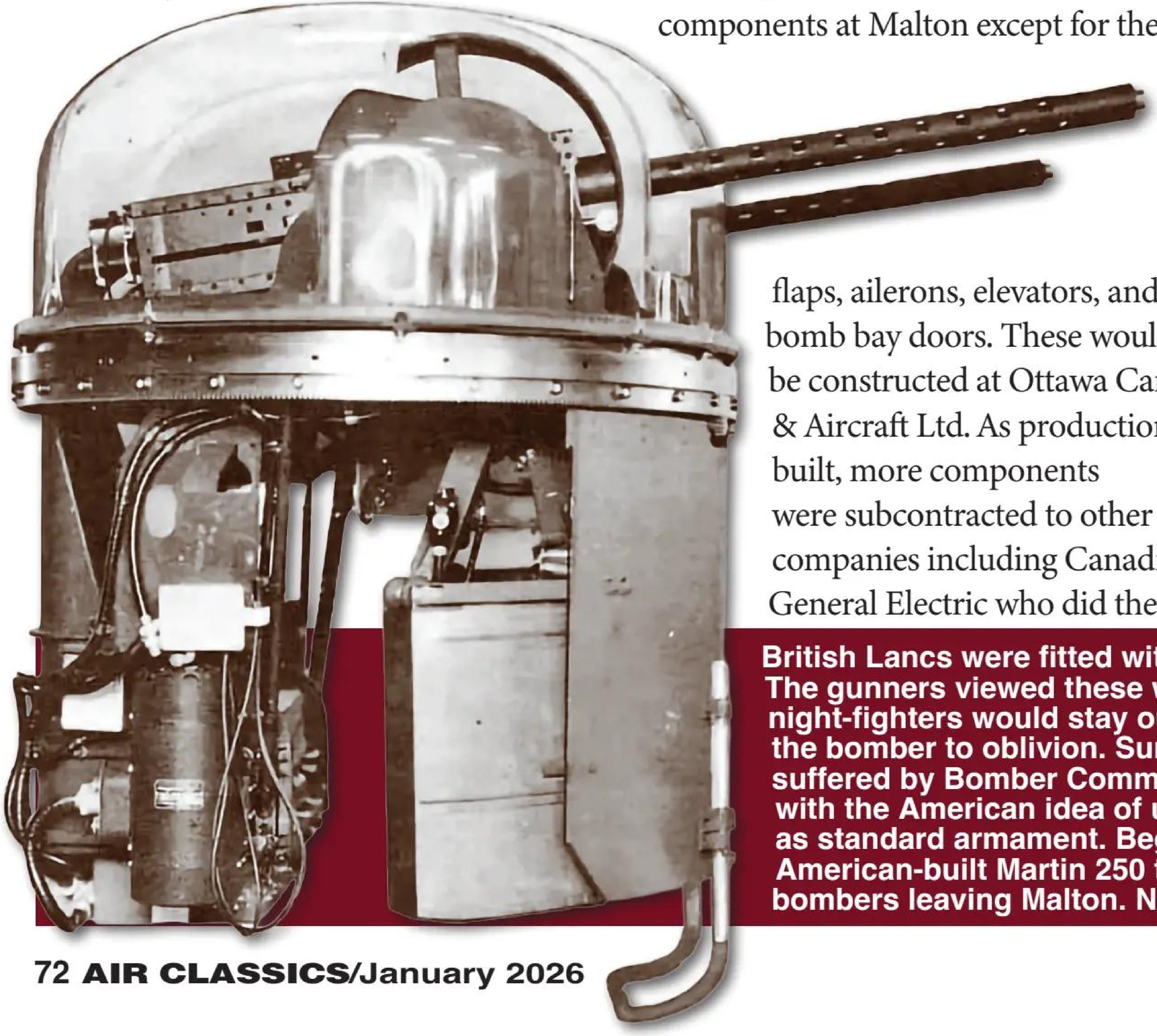
For expediency, there were to be numerous differences between Canadian Lancasters and British Lancasters. The Canadian planes were given the designation of Lancaster Mk. X and the engines were to be the same design as the Rolls-Royce powerplants but they would be built by Packard in the United States. Also, all instruments and radios were to be of Canadian or American design and manufacture. However, all major subassemblies of the Canadian bombers would be interchangeable with those of their British counterparts. This meant that if a plane was damaged in battle and needed a new left outer wing panel, then it could be drawn from British stocks and installed.

The plan was to build all needed components at Malton except for the flaps, ailerons, elevators, and bomb bay doors. These would be constructed at Ottawa Car & Aircraft Ltd. As production built, more components were subcontracted to other companies including Canadian General Electric who did the tailplane, fins, rudders and fuel tanks. Fleet Aircraft Limited at Fort Erie, Ontario, built the outer wing panels.

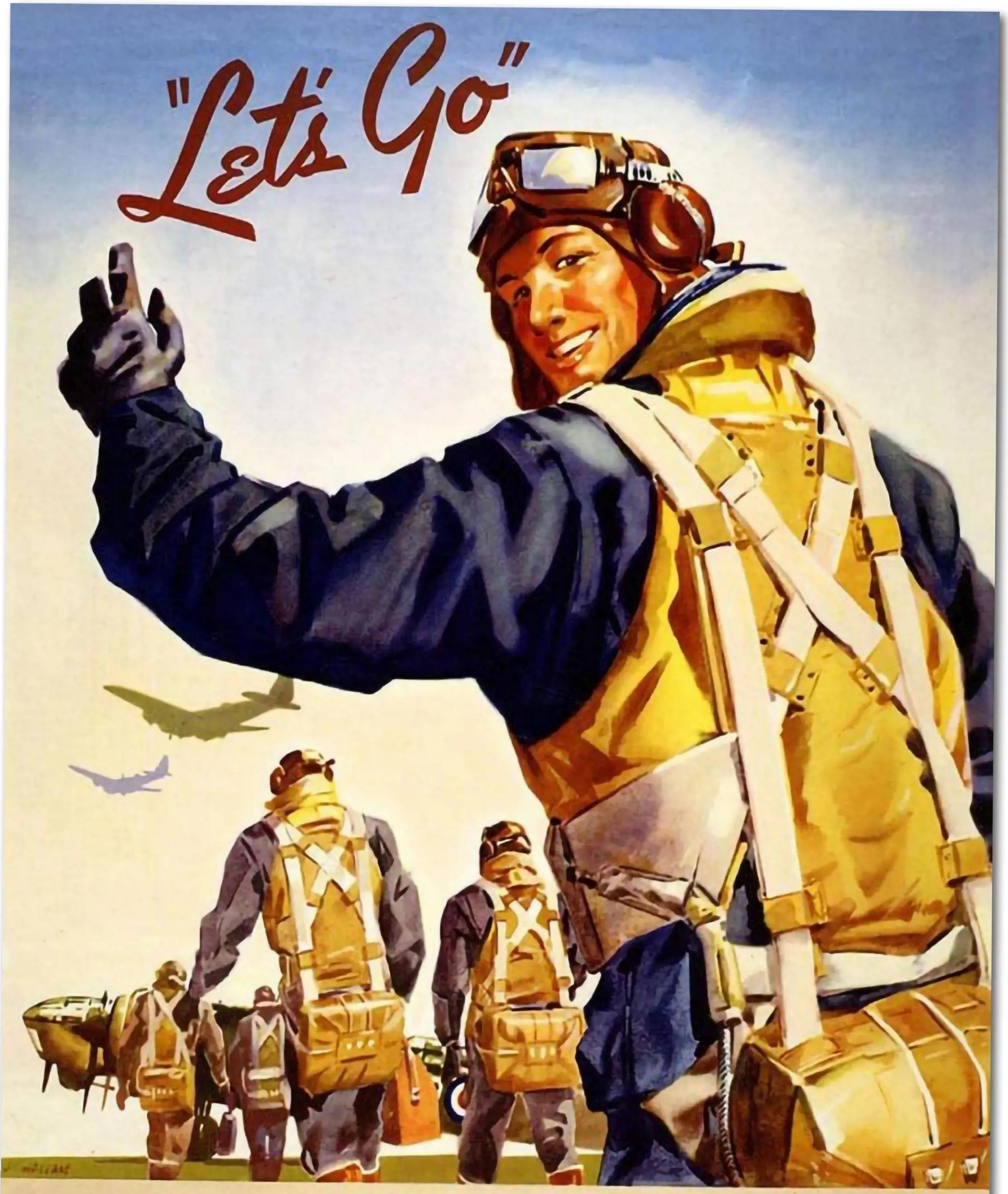
Considering the fact a heavy bomber had never been built in Canada, from first blueprint to first flight took only 16 months — a remarkable achievement. To accomplish this, the work force rose dramatically from 3300 people in 1942 to 9521 in 1944. About a quarter of the force was female.

The first Canadian Lancaster was serial KB700. It left the Victory assembly line on 1 August 1943 — almost exactly a year since the arrival of the "pattern" aircraft. Canadians were thrilled that the new bomber was going to take the war to Germany and the Lancaster was given the name *Ruhr Express* and a great deal of publicity was generated from the christening, first flight, and departure to Britain when it roared across the field and headed out over the Atlantic.

Once it arrived in the UK, Victory Aircraft was told *Ruhr Express* was the



**British Lancs were fitted with .303-caliber machine guns for defense. The gunners viewed these weapons as virtually useless for *Luftwaffe* night-fighters would stay out of the 450-yard range of the .303 and blast the bomber to oblivion. Surviving gunners stated that the huge losses suffered by Bomber Command were due simply by refusing to go along with the American idea of utilizing the deadly .50-caliber Browning as standard armament. Beginning with Lancaster Mk. X KB855, the American-built Martin 250 turret with its twin .50s was standard on the bombers leaving Malton. Now, the gunners stood a chance at survival.**


"Let's Go"
Fly and Fight with the R·C·A·F

**Squadron Leader R.J. Reg Lane and the crew that ferried *Ruhr Express* to Britain for operations with No. 405 Squadron.**

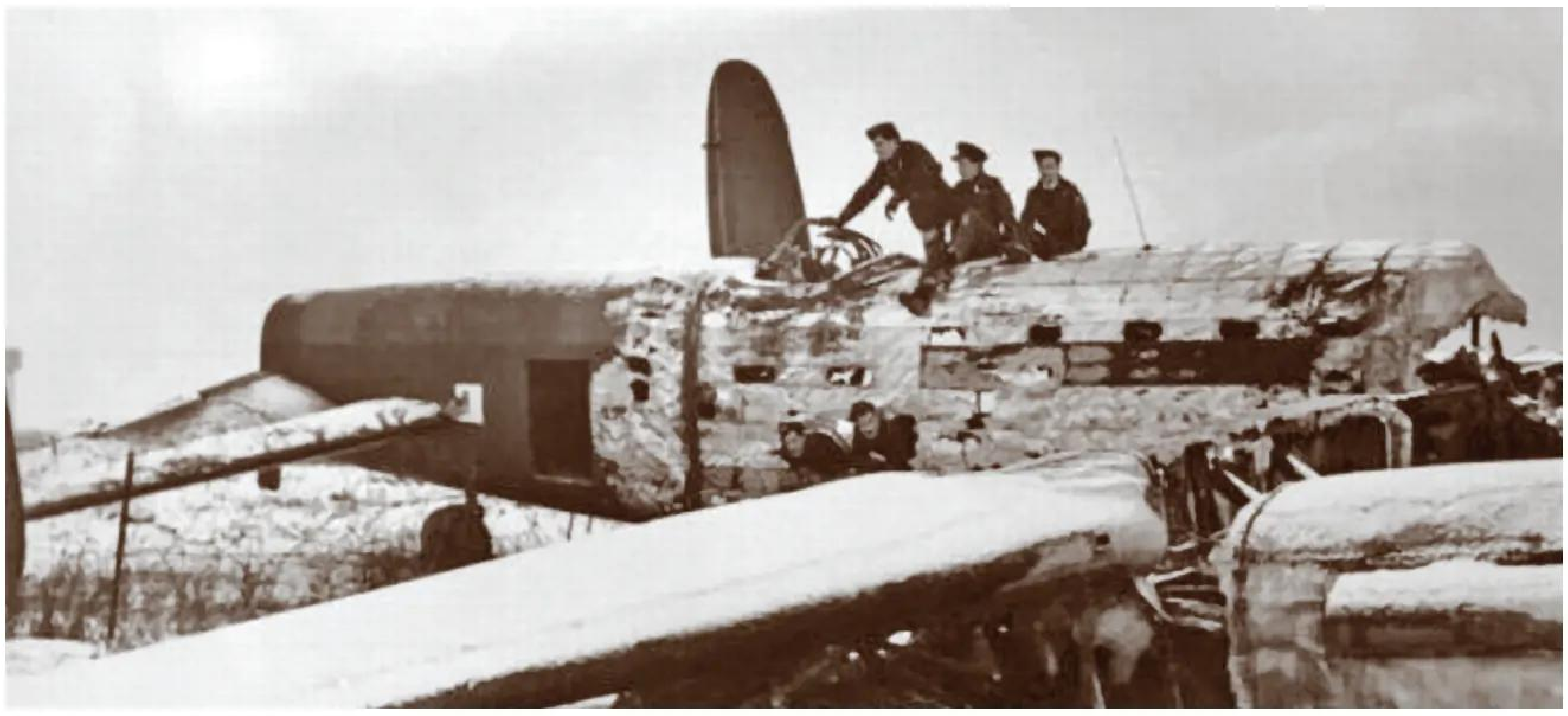
best equipped of any aircraft received from North America. Back at the factory, production kept building until one Lancaster was being completed every day. As they departed, the bombers were assigned to No. 6 Group, which was the RCAF component of Bomber Command.

Victory would build 430 Lancaster Mk. Xs but the sobering fact is that about 100 would be lost in combat. This broke down to 70 being lost in combat and around 30 others being written off during training flights or crashing in Britain on their return from Germany. Lancaster X KB732 completed 83 missions while flying with No. 419 Squadron — the most of any Victory Lanc.

The affection in Canada for *Ruhr Express* was such that there were plans to bring the bomber back to Canada after its 50th mission and place the bomber as a memorial to the Canadians that worked so hard to produce the aircraft. However, that was not to be.

On 2 January 1945, KB700 was returning from an attack on Nuremberg — the bomber's 49th mission. Preparing to land, the bomber began to experience problems. The flight engineer noticed that the hydraulic system was not performing as it should, perhaps due to damage from anti-aircraft fire. As the Lanc lined up to land, the flaps would not deploy and the aircraft overshot the runway and went skidding into the farm field that bordered the base. That was not so bad but what was bad is that the Lanc collided with a trench digger. The big piece of machinery ripped the plane apart and a fire started. Among exploding ammunition, the crew scrambled to safety but the *Ruhr Express* was lost along with the plan to turn the bomber into a Canadian memorial.

***Ruhr Express* arrives in Britain to begin operations against Germany.**



**The plan was to return *Ruhr Express* to Canada after its 50th combat mission. Unfortunately, the Lancaster was destroyed on its 49th mission but the crew survived.**

With the end of the war in Europe, the majority of surviving Lancaster Xs were flown back to Canada and many of these planes were filled with freed POWs, lots of who were Canadians. The aircraft then went to Nova Scotia where they were prepared to become part of Tiger Force — the Commonwealth plan to attack Japan. However, the American atomic bombs put an end to Tiger Force and the war quickly came to an end.

When National Steel Car started the project, the factory had about 60,000-sq-ft but at the height of Victory Aircraft production, it was 1,272,005-sq-ft. Overall, Canadian aviation industry employed approximately 116,200 people at its height during 1944. The industry produced 5874 combat aircraft, 3787 primary trainers, and 6757 advanced trainers. Aircraft built included the Lancaster, Mosquito, Canso, Helldiver, Hurricane, Bolingbroke, Lysander, Anson, Harvard, Cornell, Tiger Moth, and Norseman.

The end of the war saw the factory staff cut to just 400. The Canadian government stepped in and on 5 December 1945, Victory Aircraft was sold and soon renamed A.V. Roe Canada Limited. During the late 1940s and 1950s, Avro Canada and its subsidiaries became a leading aerospace concern, conducting advanced research on aircraft design. Tragically, the treacherous government cancellation of the CF-105 Arrow hit the company hard and by 1962 it ceased operation.

After the war, many of the Lancaster Mk. Xs were scrapped but others flew on for years in a variety of duties. That is for another article as we wanted to show how the "pattern" Lancaster helped speed the end of the devastating war. **AC**

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## AIR CLASSICS

# CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

*SOME GREAT GIFT SUGGESTIONS FOR THE READERS OF AIR CLASSICS*

**BY SUSAN DUPREY**

**Some of the Palm Springs Air Museum's classic planes in formation. The P-63 is a single-seater so it obviously can't give rides but the Mustang and Gooney Bird certainly can. (M. O'Leary)**

## THE GIFT OF FLIGHT

Certainly one of the best gifts for Christmas that we can think of is a ride in a real Warbird! The Palm Springs Air Museum offers a variety of flight experiences to fit everyone's budget. Popular rides include the D-Day Douglas C-47 and, of course, the P-51 Mustang. "The Mustang is certainly one of our favorite rides," states the museum's Fred Bell. "Everyone loves the Mustang and our two aircraft are kept extremely busy — especially during the winter season when a lot of people visit Palm Springs to enjoy our beautiful weather. Of course, you do not have to come to the Palm Springs Air Museum just to fly in one of our vintage aircraft. Plan to come for the whole day and wander through our wonderful collection of aircraft and memorabilia. We have everything from a Stealth Fighter to vintage biplanes — the entire family will enjoy their time in the museum. If a visitor does wish to take a ride in one of our perfectly-maintained Warbirds, then please call ahead to check for availability. Larger groups will really like our Gooney Bird and it offers a great view of our desert and mountains during a comfortable and relaxing flight. For those wanting a bit more speed, we have the Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star — the most famous of all jet trainers. The T-33 really fills that need for speed! For those wanting the feel of air blowing past them, then our Stearman biplane is absolutely ideal. There is nothing more fun that a late afternoon flight in the Stearman." Please check out the ad in this issue and call the museum to book a flight.

**Original WWII B-25 non-airworthy exhaust stacks are a great collectable.**

## B-25 MITCHELL EXHAUST STACKS

Want something unusual — then how about a pair of original North American B-25 Mitchell exhaust stacks? Aero Trader is offering a set of two early model B-25 exhaust stacks. These early production items were finished in blue porcelain enamel and make for a very distinctive display. These are original (but non-airworthy) WWII items and are quite collectable. The early stacks were given the blue porcelain finish for added durability but as the pressure of war production increased, the finish was dropped. These make great display items and can be easily fashioned into book ends. The set of exhaust stacks is just $75 and includes postage and packing. Remember, new airworthy exhaust stacks cost $195 each (and they are available) so these well-used examples are a bargain. For further information, call Aero Trader at 909-974-4020.

The dog tag serves a remembrance to the 26,000 Americans that died in service with the 8th Air Force.

## HONORING THE FALLEN

During the Christmas season, a truly meaningful gift is being offered by the National Museum of the Mighty 8th Air Force. The museum is producing dog tags to honor the 26,000 young Americans that died defending freedom while in the service of the 8th Air Force. A $100 tax deductible donation secures a dog tag and the name of a fallen airman. The duplicate dog tag will be placed on display in the museum. The story of the fallen airman can then be researched to learn more about the person and their short life. With history being poorly taught in today's education system, this is a perfect gift for a young person and it way well serve as a motivation for them to learn more about the 8th AF and WWII. For more information, please go to *www.mightyeighth.org*.

CAT ON THE COURSE: F-14 BURNS UP THE RENO PYLONS
JANUARY 2026 · Vol.62/No.1
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Impressive die-cast B-17G model.

Duffel bag with embroidered pilot's wings.

Bright red hoodie with TWA logo.

## GREAT GIFTS FROM SPORTY'S

We all know that Sporty's Aviation Gifts has a tremendous catalogue of items and many of them make ideal gifts for any aviation enthusiasts. Some of our favorites include Sporty's wide range of vintage propellers (non-airworthy) and one that we particularly like is the six-foot solid wood prop that replicates that of a 1920s original. This big prop (SKU 10076) is just $149.99 and makes an idea display whether standing upright or mounted on the wall. When it comes to models, Sporty's can fill any need — civil, military, airline, or Warbird. One of our favorites is the 1/72nd scale model of Boeing B-17G *Man O' War II* that spans an impressive 17.25 inches. This die cast model comes completely finished and painted in the markings of a famous 91st Bomb Group Fortress. Priced at $199.99 (SKU 10813), the model has optional retracted or extended landing gear, a metal display stand, spinning propellers, moving control surfaces, and a closed/open bomb bay with detailed bombs. It is perfect for any B-17 enthusiast.

When it comes to clothing, how about a hoodie in the markings of a favorite airline? One of the ones we liked was this bright red hoodie carried the famous TWA logo. It is a bargain at $79.99 (SKU 1178) and the hoodie is also made with a Pan Am logo. Another great item is the duffel bag with embroidered pilot's wings. Ruggedly made to withstand all weather, the duffel is $49.99 (SKU 9862) and is ready for any flight task. See the ad in this issue for further suggestions.

Sporty's six-foot wood prop makes a definite statement.

GHOSTS 2026
GHOSTS 2026

The great Ghosts calendars for 2026.

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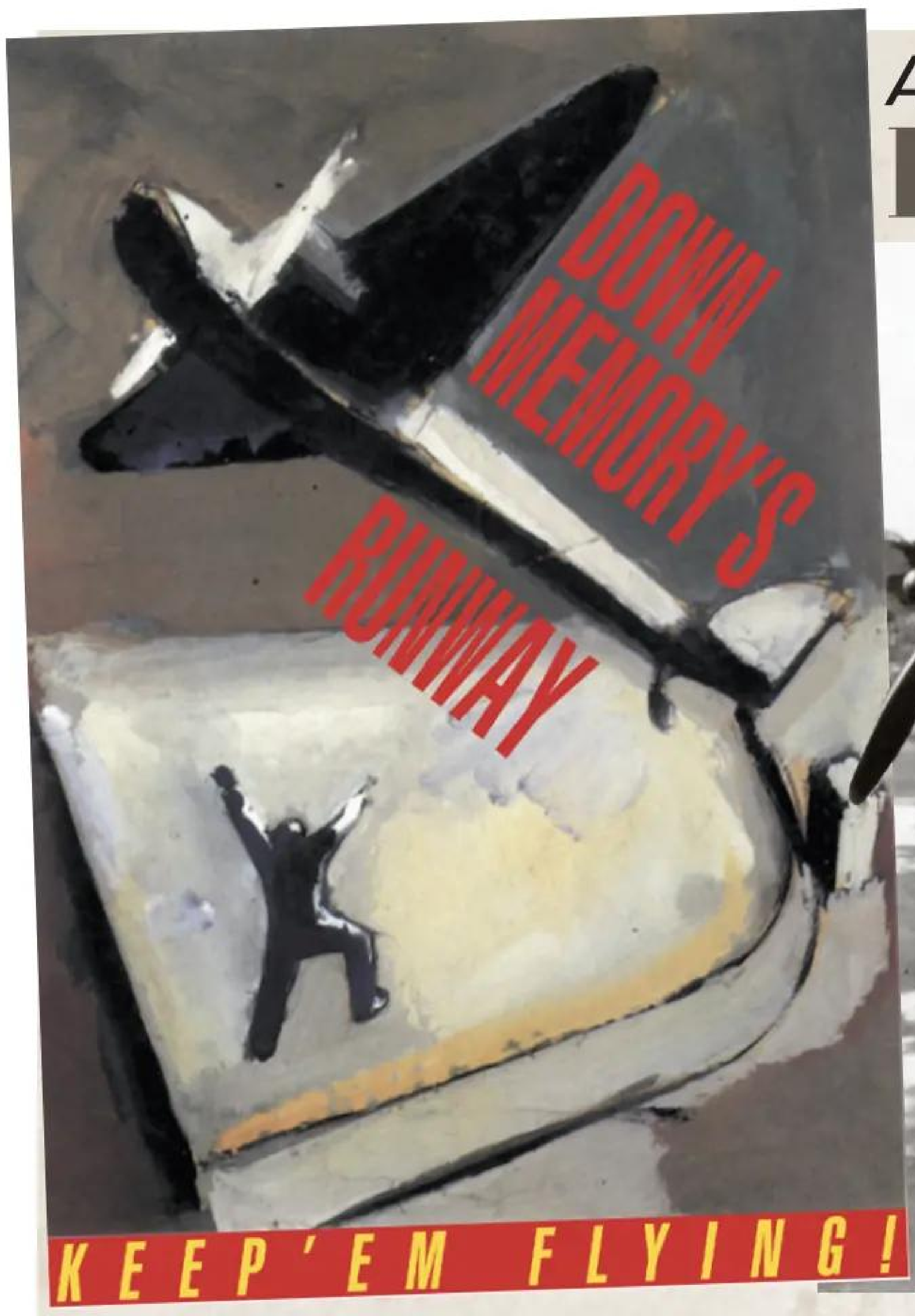
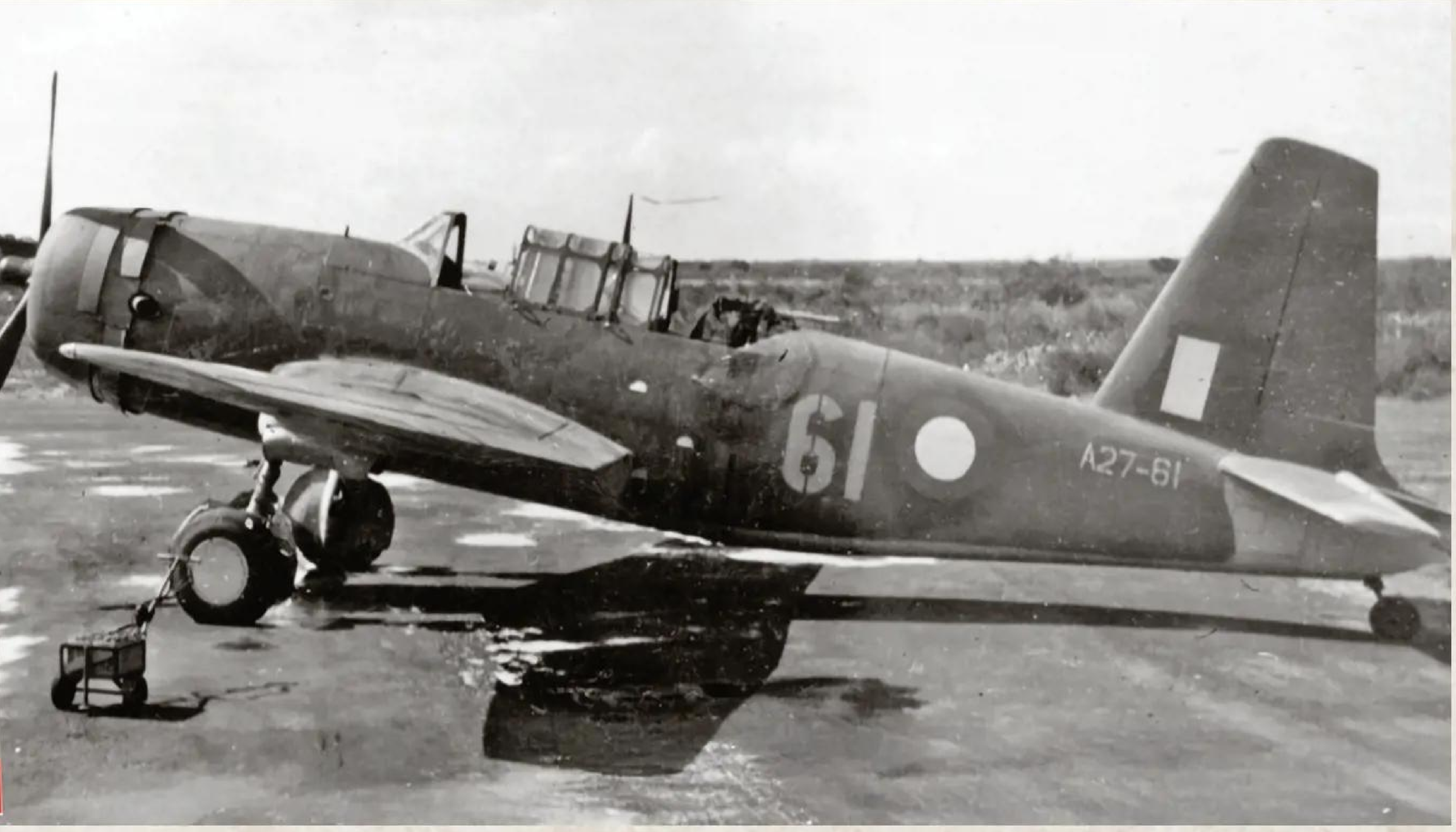
Now in its 46th award-winning year, Philip "The Ghost" Makanna's series of super high-quality aviation calendars is a must for each and every aviation enthusiast. As usual, for 2026 the calendars come in two variants — World War Two and World War One. Each page is 20x14 inches, opening to 20x28 inches for a truly spectacular display. These calendars are multiple award-winners and have become quite collectable. Each image can easily be removed and framed. Each calendar is just $19.99 and can be ordered from *www.ghosts.com*. **AC**

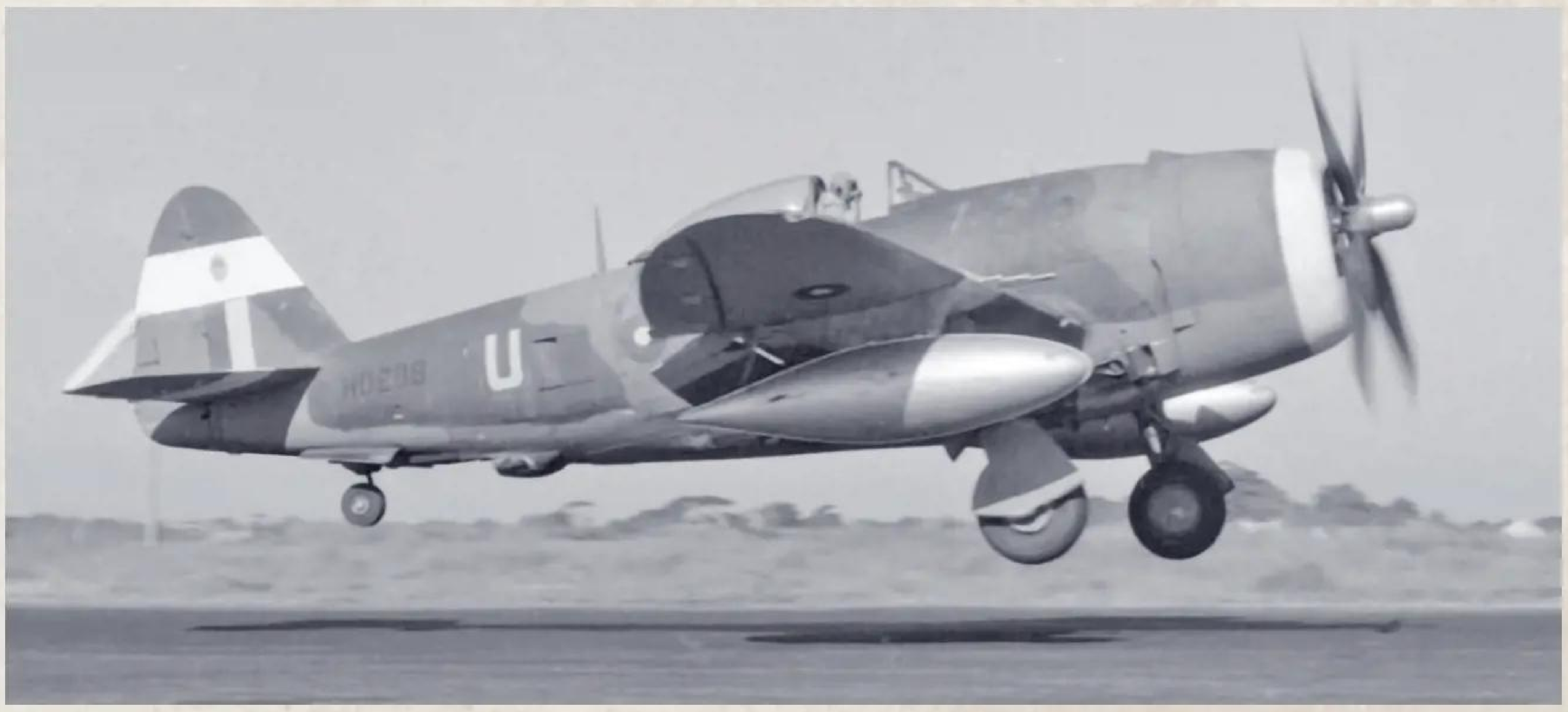


## *AMERICAN AIRCRAFT FROM AVIATION'S GLORIOUS PAST*

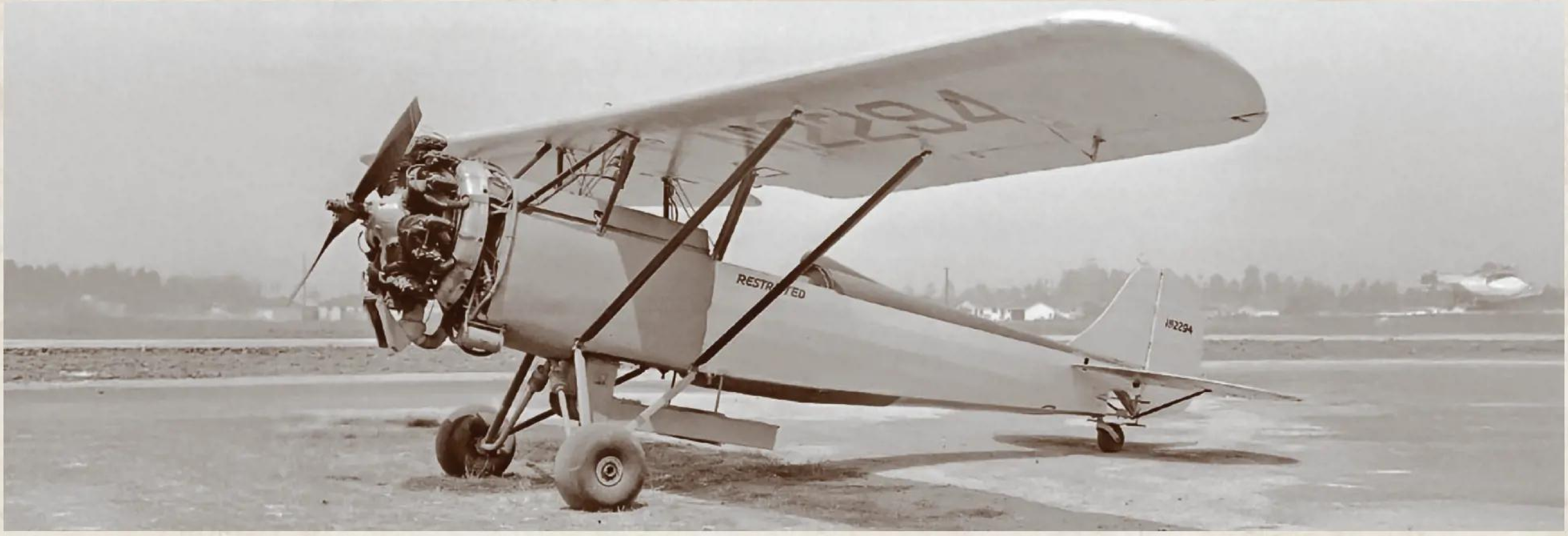
## BY NORM TAYLOR



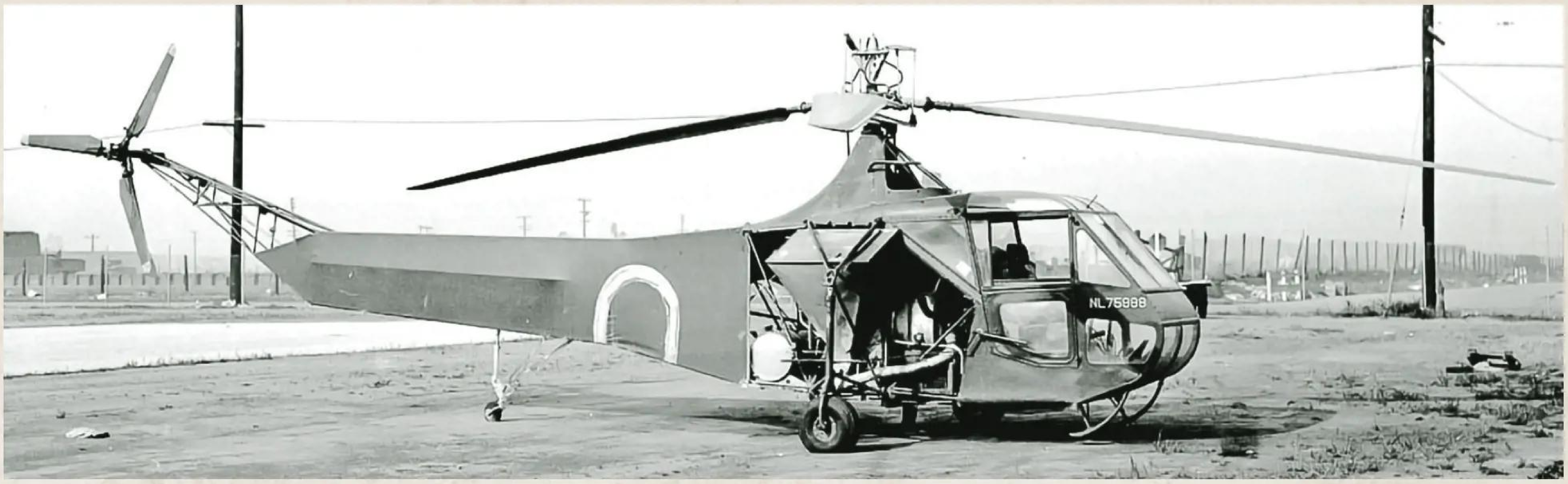
**When it came to the Vultee Vengeance series of dive-bombers, the USAAF was less than excited about the type. The North American A-36A was actually a much more effective aircraft in that role and once its bombs were dropped, it could turn around and attack enemy fighters. The USAAF even gave consideration to putting the A-36A back into production but that was not to be. The Vengeance found much more ready acceptance with our Allies and A27-61 was operated by the Royal Australian Air Force. The craft was delivered in 1943 and assigned to No. 4 OTU (Operational Training Unit) at Williamtown, New South Wales. The aircraft stayed with that squadron through the end of the war. With no post-war use, and with very few flying hours, the dive-bomber was sold for scrap.**



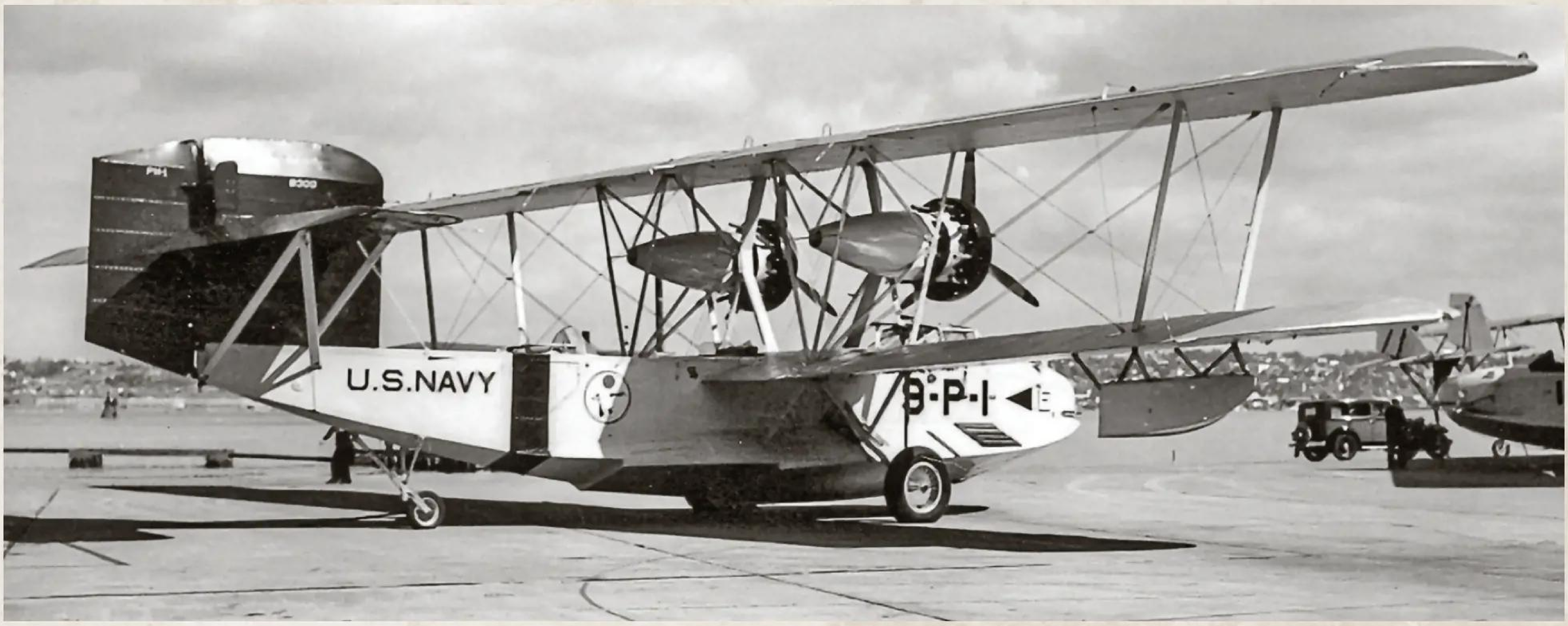
**Another American aircraft widely used by our Allies was the Republic Thunderbolt. Throttle back, the pilot of Thunderbolt Mk. II (P-47D) HD298 was about ready for a three-point touchdown. Photographed during October 1944, HD298 was assigned to No. 32 Squadron (which had just started operations with the type that month) at Chittagong Zahurul Haque, Bangladesh. That remote part of the war saw ferocious fighting against the Japanese. HD298 did not last long. On 17 November 1944, the Thunderbolt was returning from a mission and collided with another aircraft while landing. The pilot died of his injuries.**



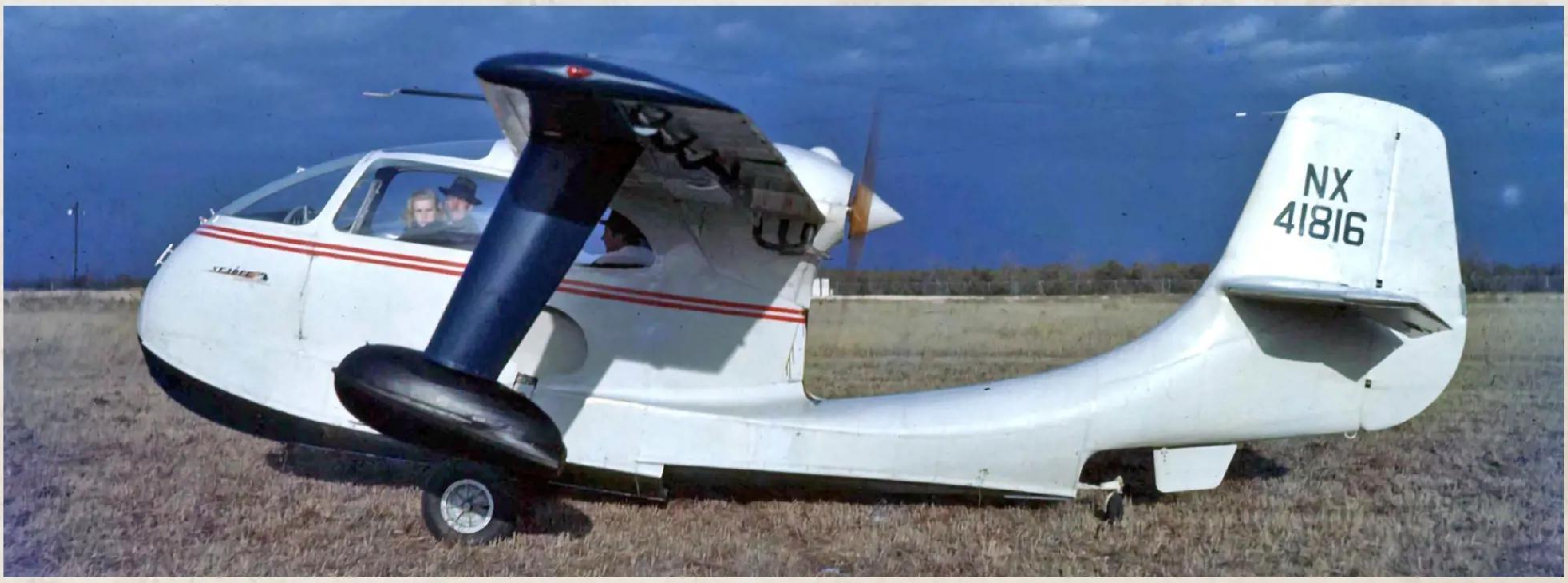
**When it was first announced, the General-Western P-2 Meteor achieved considerable publicity. However, the Great Depression was upon the country and, in the end, only six Meteors were built. For such a limited production aircraft, the plane was quite popular and had good flying qualities. NR12294 was the last of the six built and after the war it was converted into a crop duster. The plane was photographed during August 1953 at Central Airport in Compton, California, by William T. Larkins and the rapid growth of southern California is illustrated by the houses being built right to the airport boundary. At the time, there were still many agricultural fields nearby so it was not uncommon to see the Meteor and other such types spraying and dusting while dodging through the new communities.**



Another very rare agricultural conversion was Sikorsky R-4B USAAF 43-46560/NL75988 that was also photographed by William T. Larkins at Central Airport in Compton. This little-known small airfield was established in 1940 by E.G. "Slim" Kidwell and his partner, none other than Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan. At the best of times, Wrong Way was extremely difficult to get along with and the partnership soon dissolved. The field was surrounded by farms and after the war there were dozens of aircraft based at Central — the majority being war surplus and this motivated Bill to make several visits. The field was home to everything from C-47s on down. The civil-registered R-4 was rare to start with and Bill thought it was the only example of the type to be modified for ag work. By 1952, the airport and its 3000-ft runway were covered with housing.



During the 1920s and 1930s, the US Navy operated a bewildering variety of flying boats. Included was the Naval Aircraft Factory/Martin PM-1. Photographed at NAS North Island, BuNo A-8300 was the production variant of the Naval Aircraft Factory PN-12, which in itself can trace its origin back to the British Felixstowe F5L. NAF had limited production capability so the type was licensed out to Martin (PM-1/PM-2), Keystone (PK-1), and Douglas (PD-1). Each company added their own features to the basic design.



Not exactly what it seems. At first glance, it appears that this 1945 Rudy Arnold photograph depicts the famous SeaBee post-war amphibian. It doesn't. The aircraft is actually the prototype Republic RC-1 Thunderbolt (the company was attempting to capitalize on its famed P-47). Registered NX41816, the RC-1 was a three-seater that derived from the innovative Spencer Air Car. The RC-1 would evolve into the RC-3 SeaBee, which had a more powerful engine and capacity for four. **AC**

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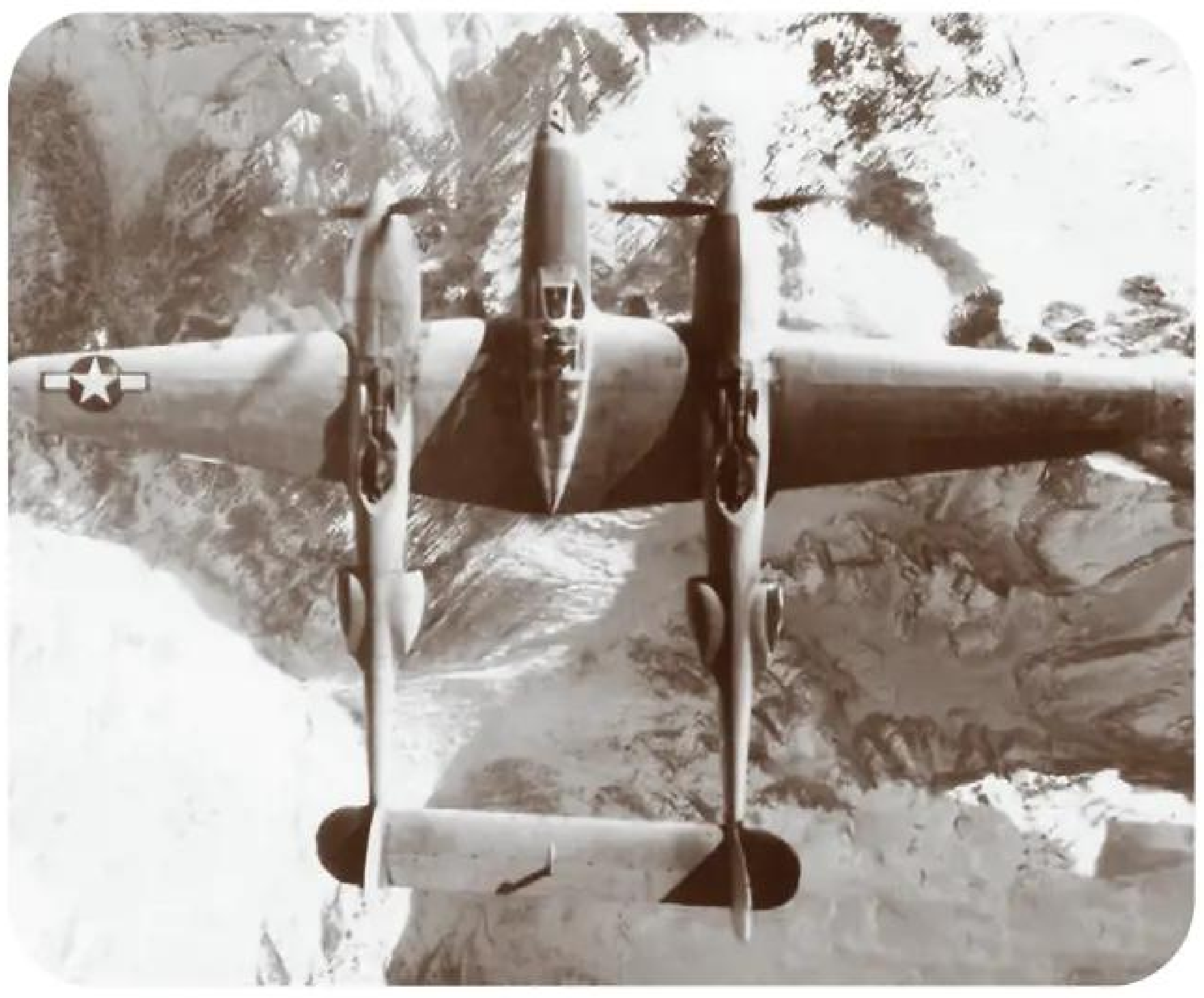

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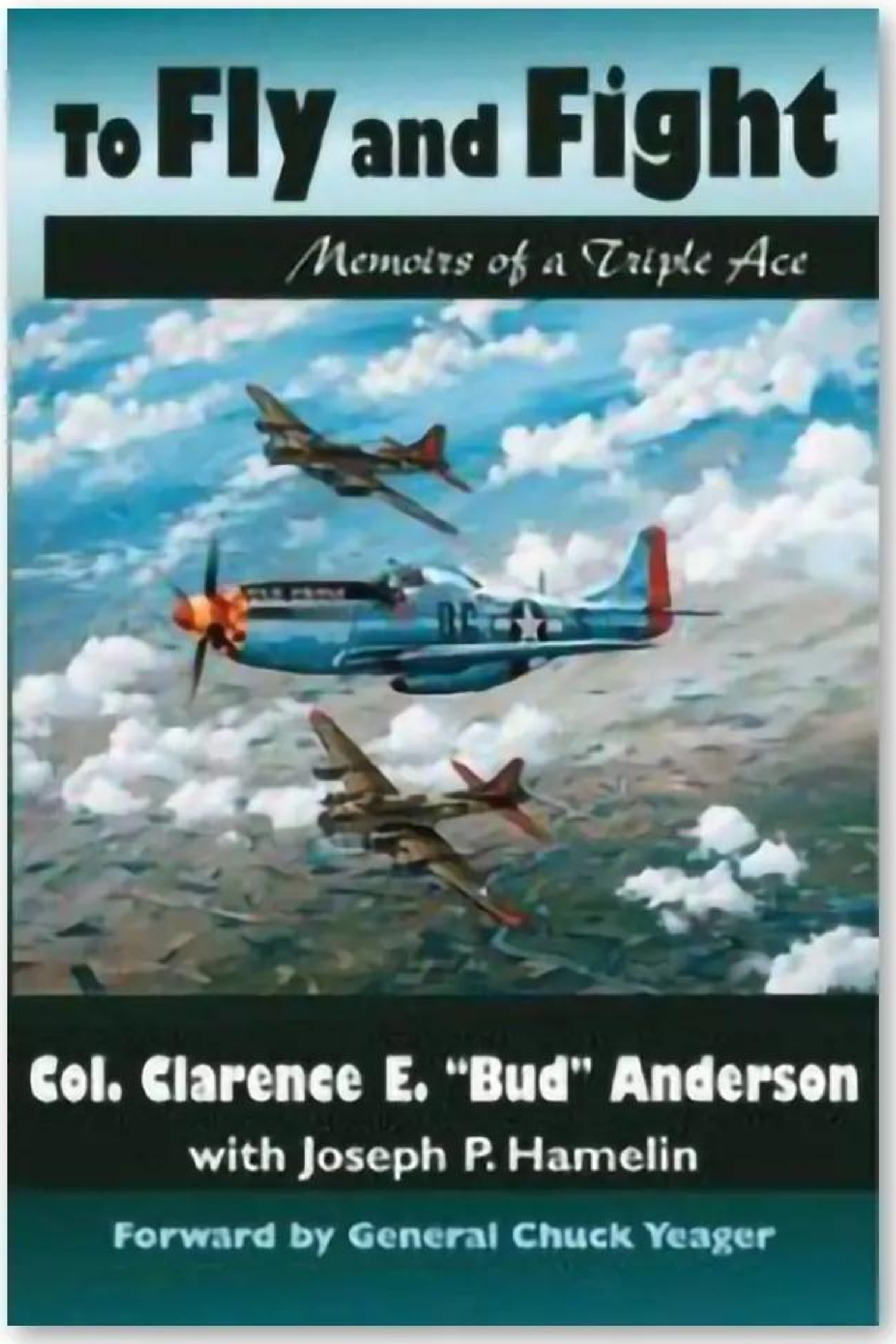
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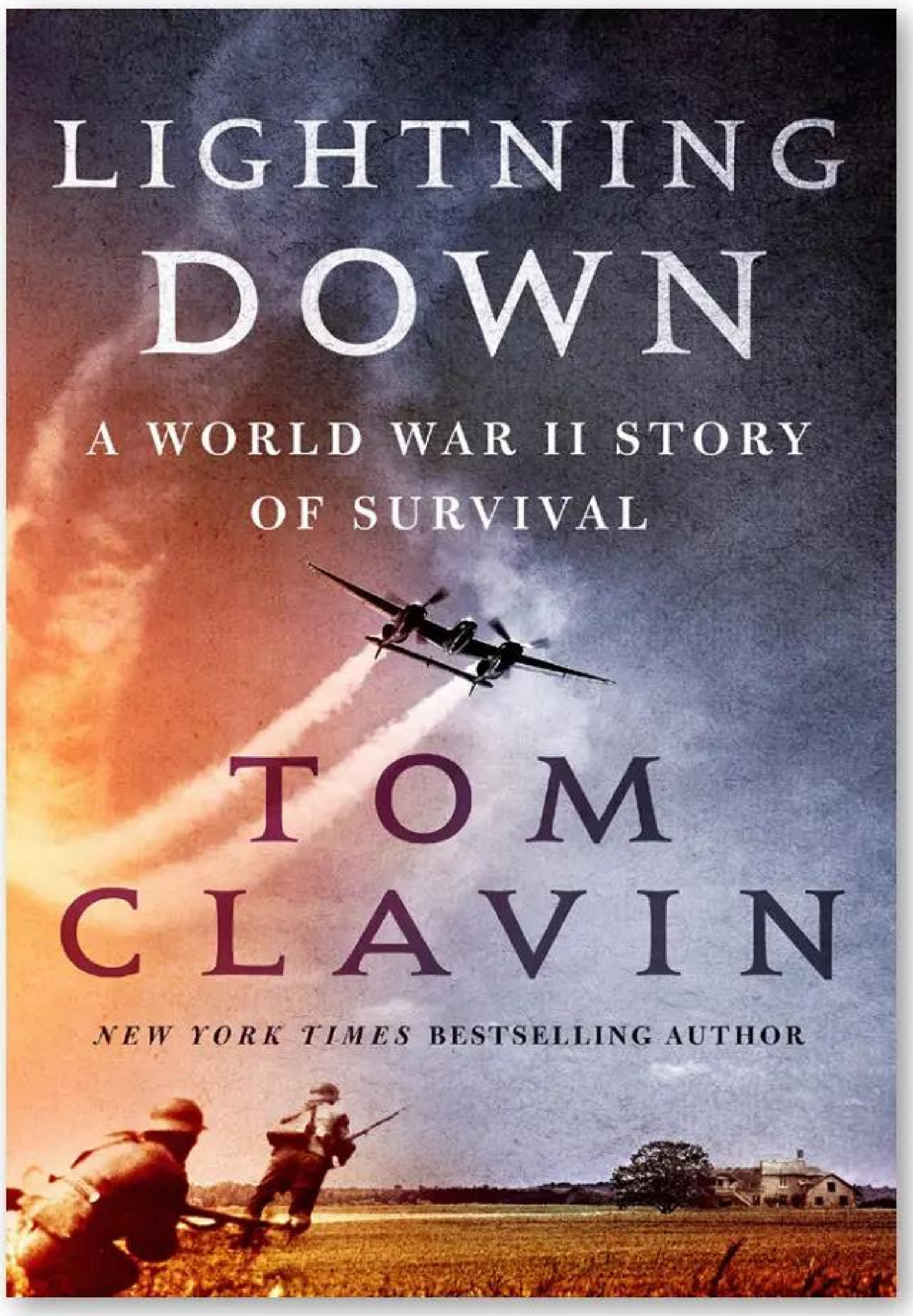
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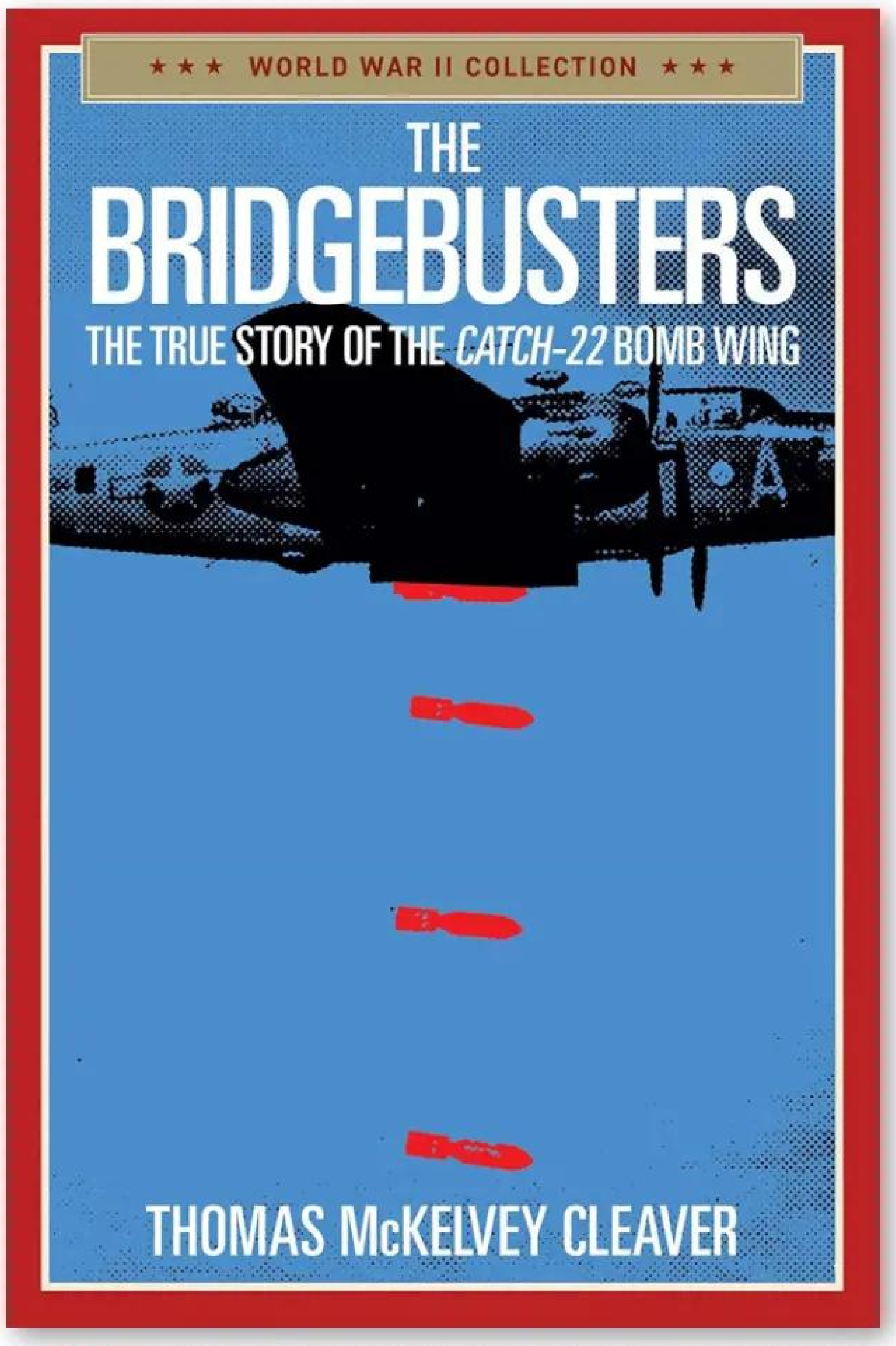
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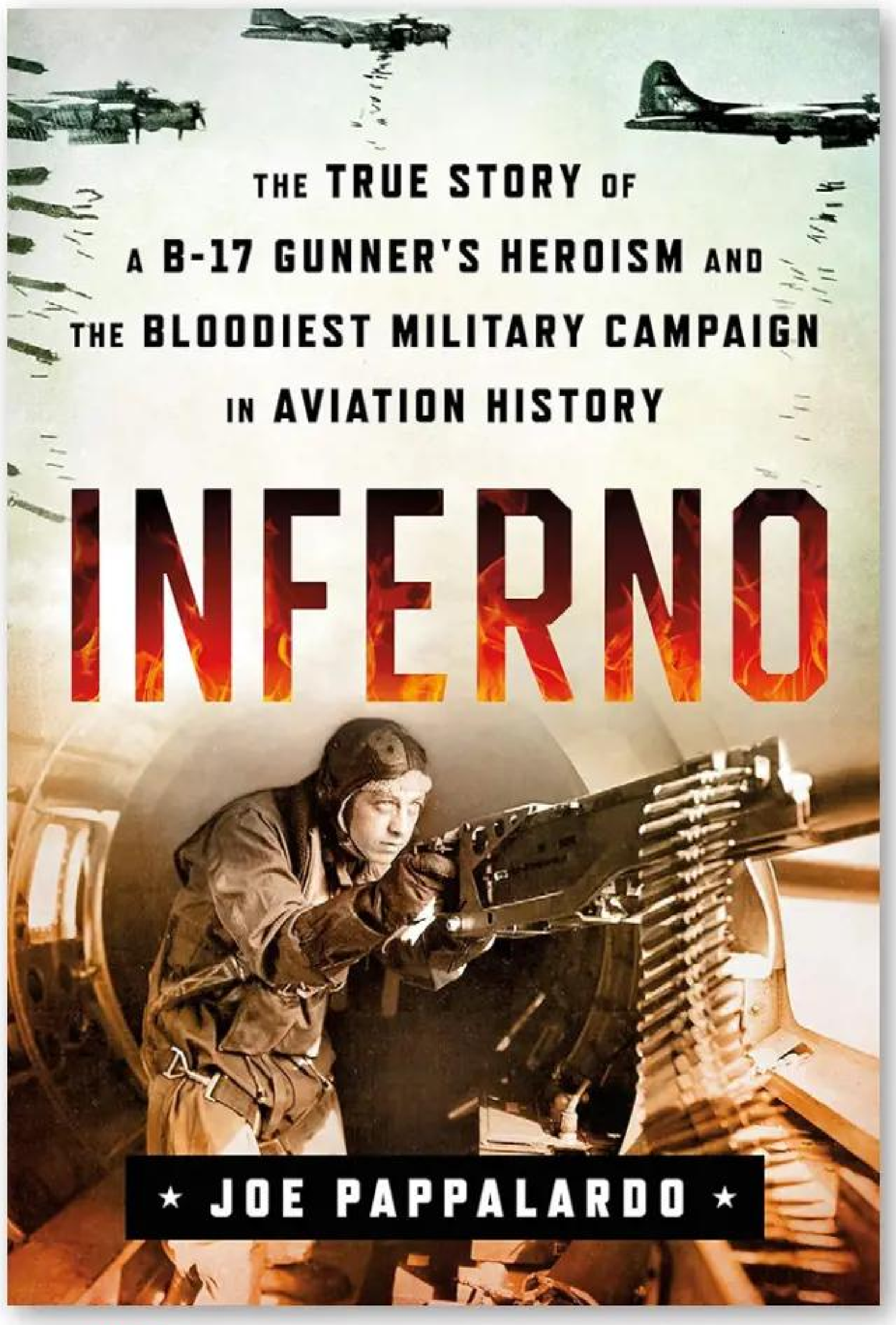
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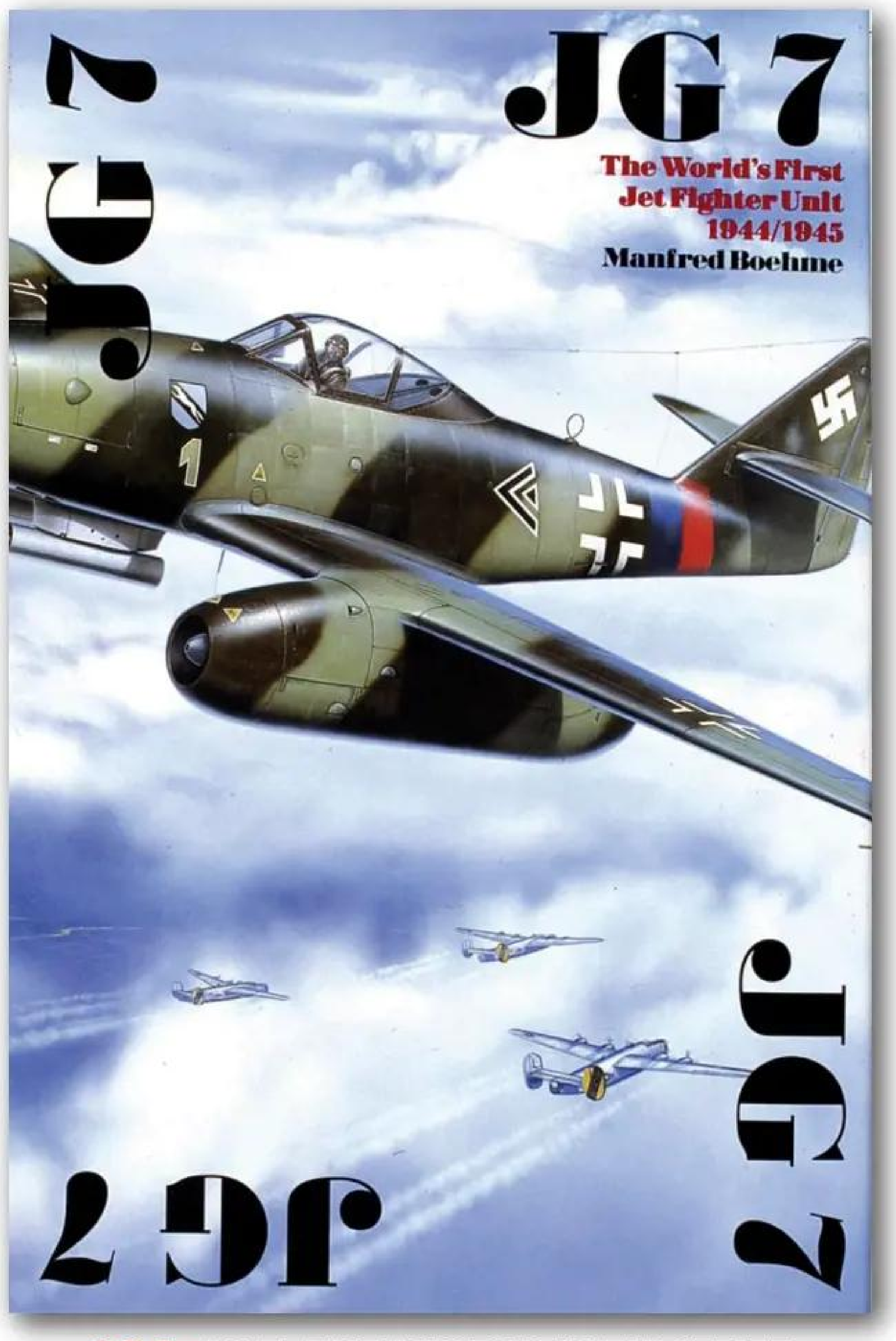
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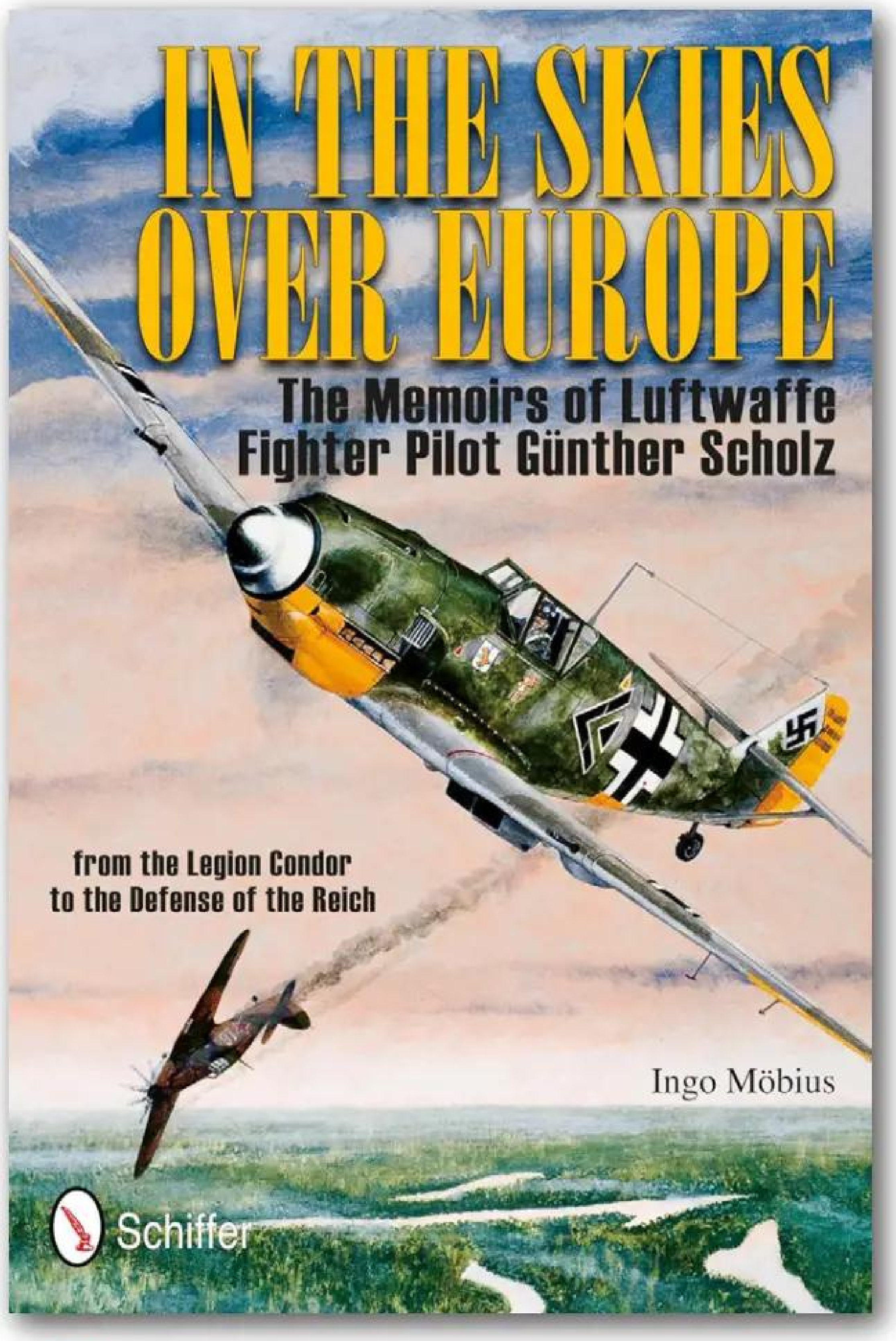
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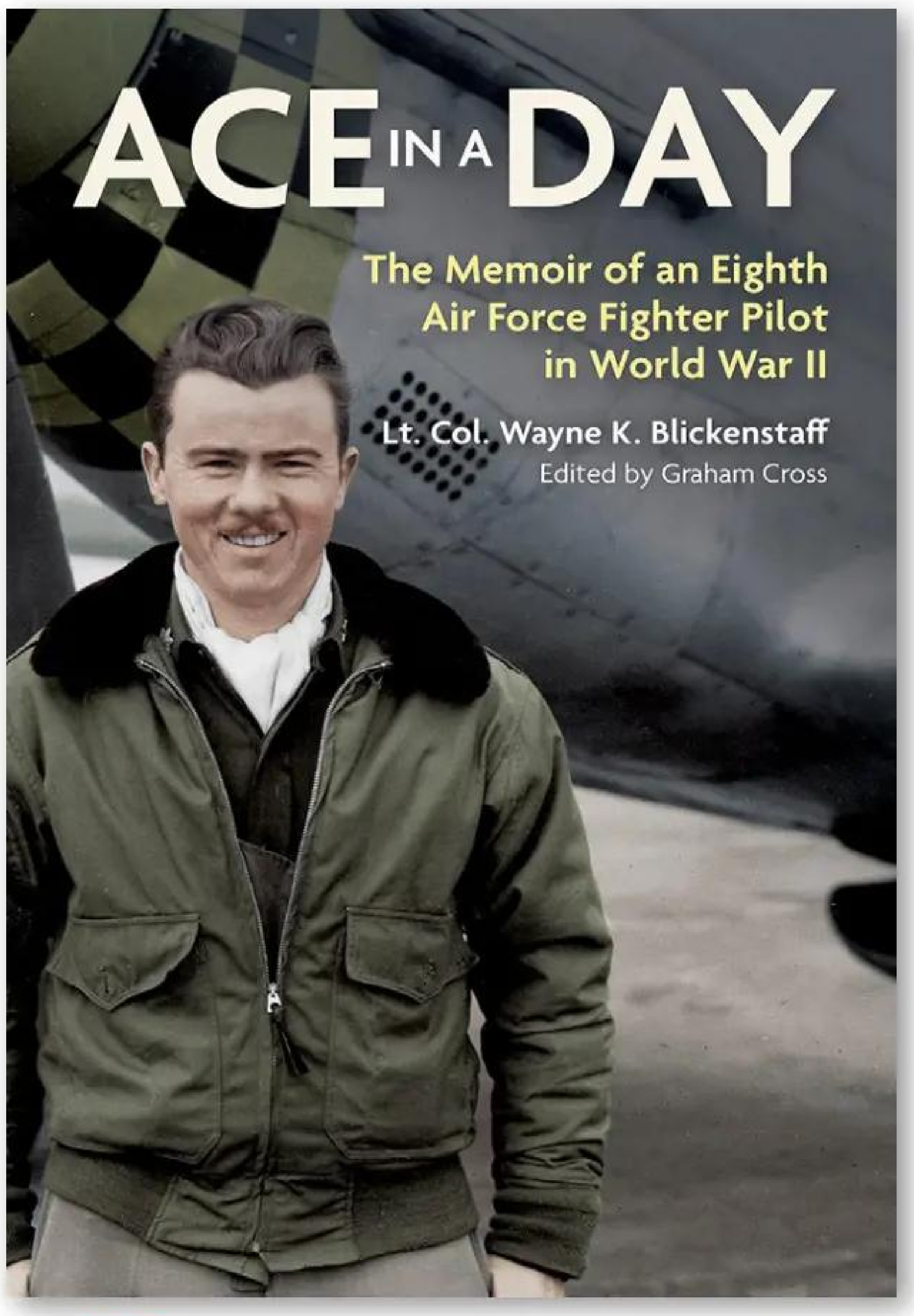
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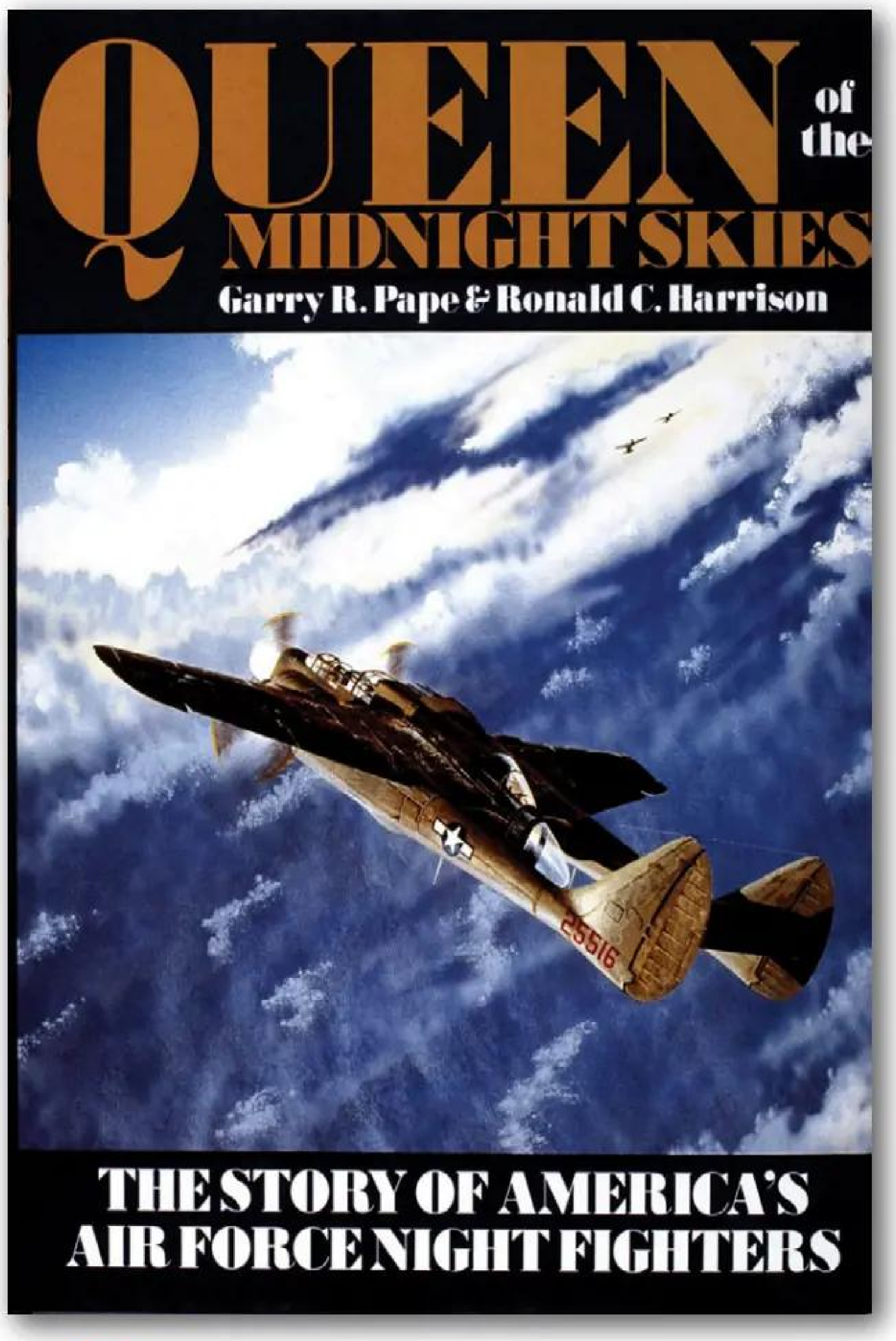
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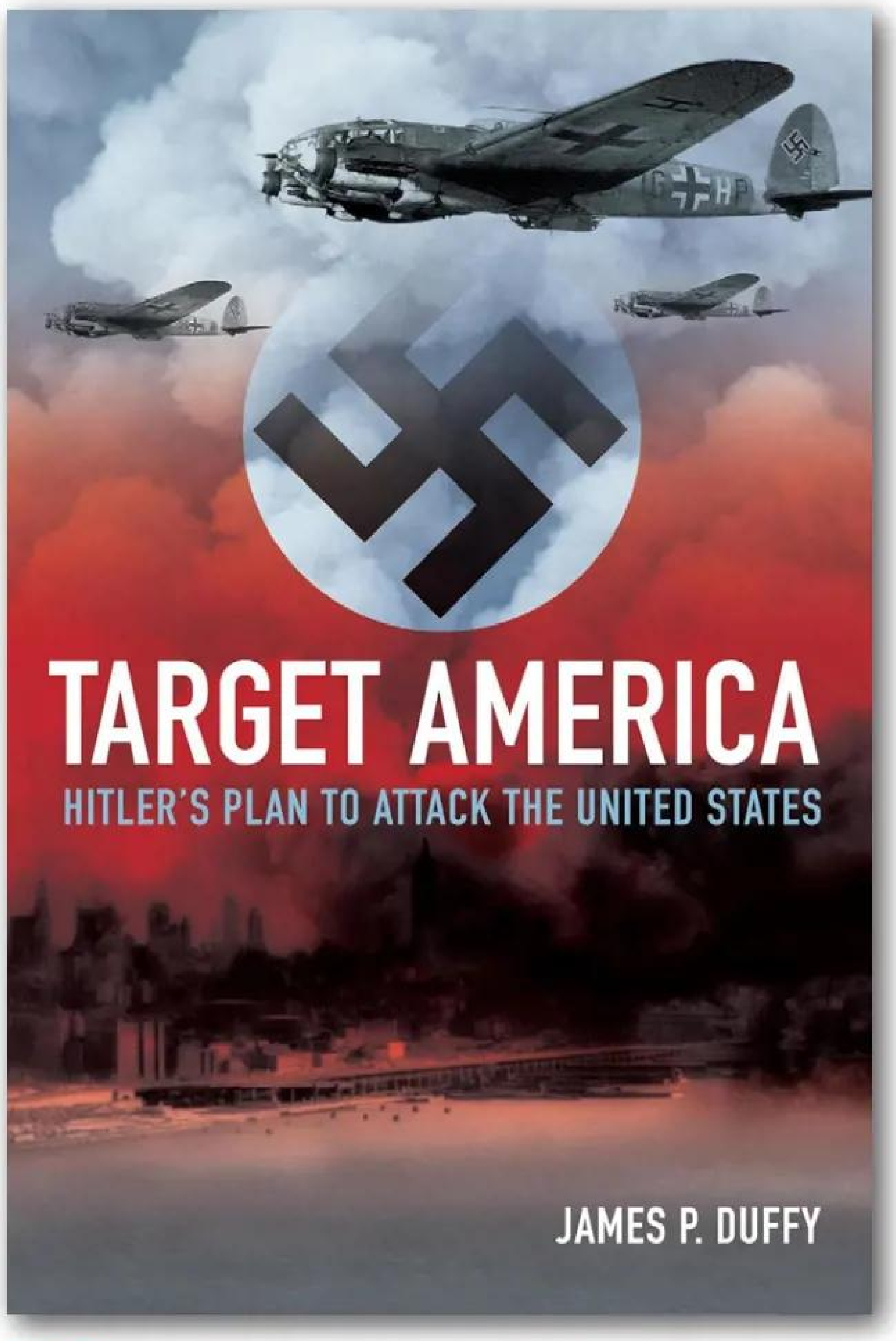
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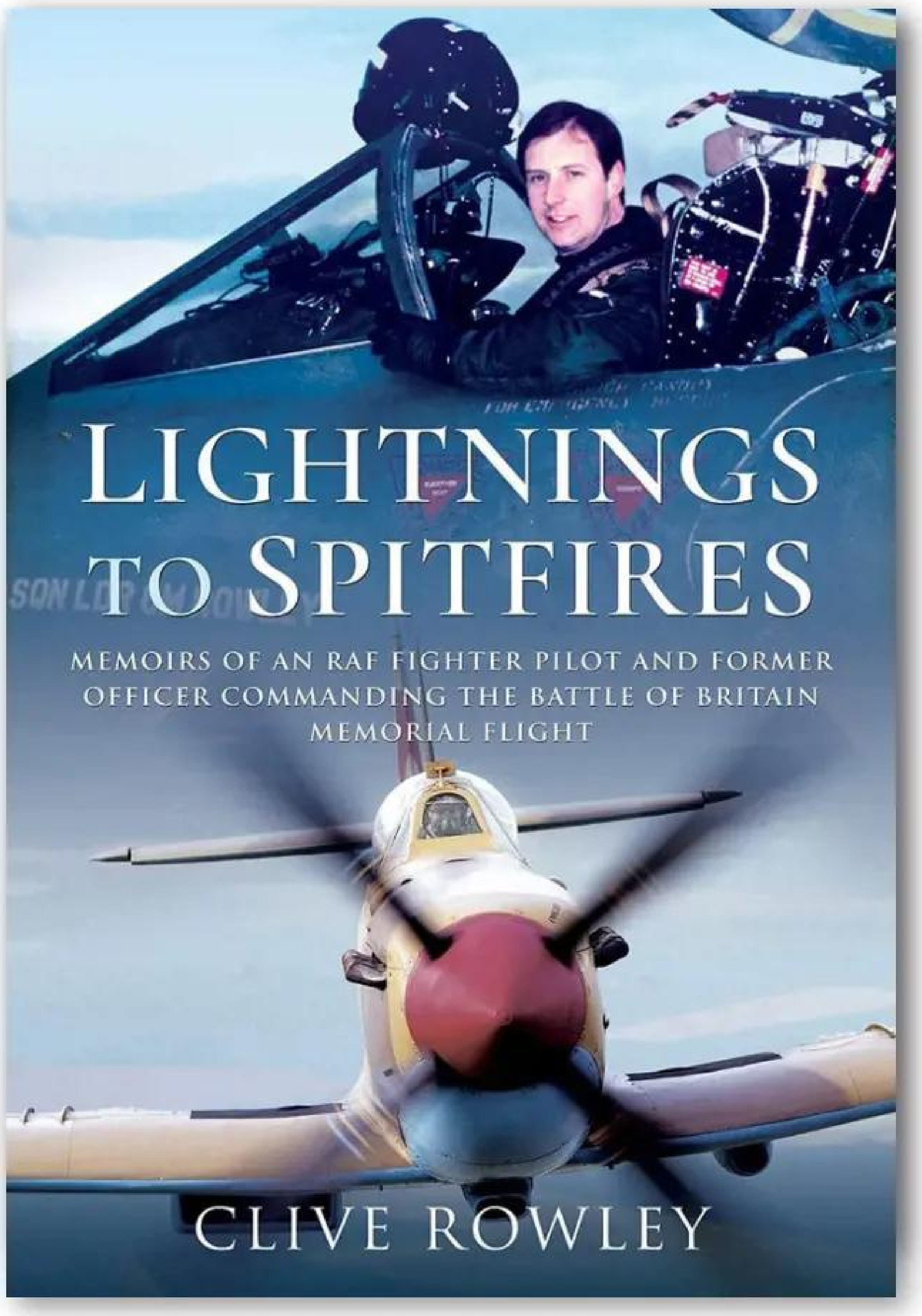
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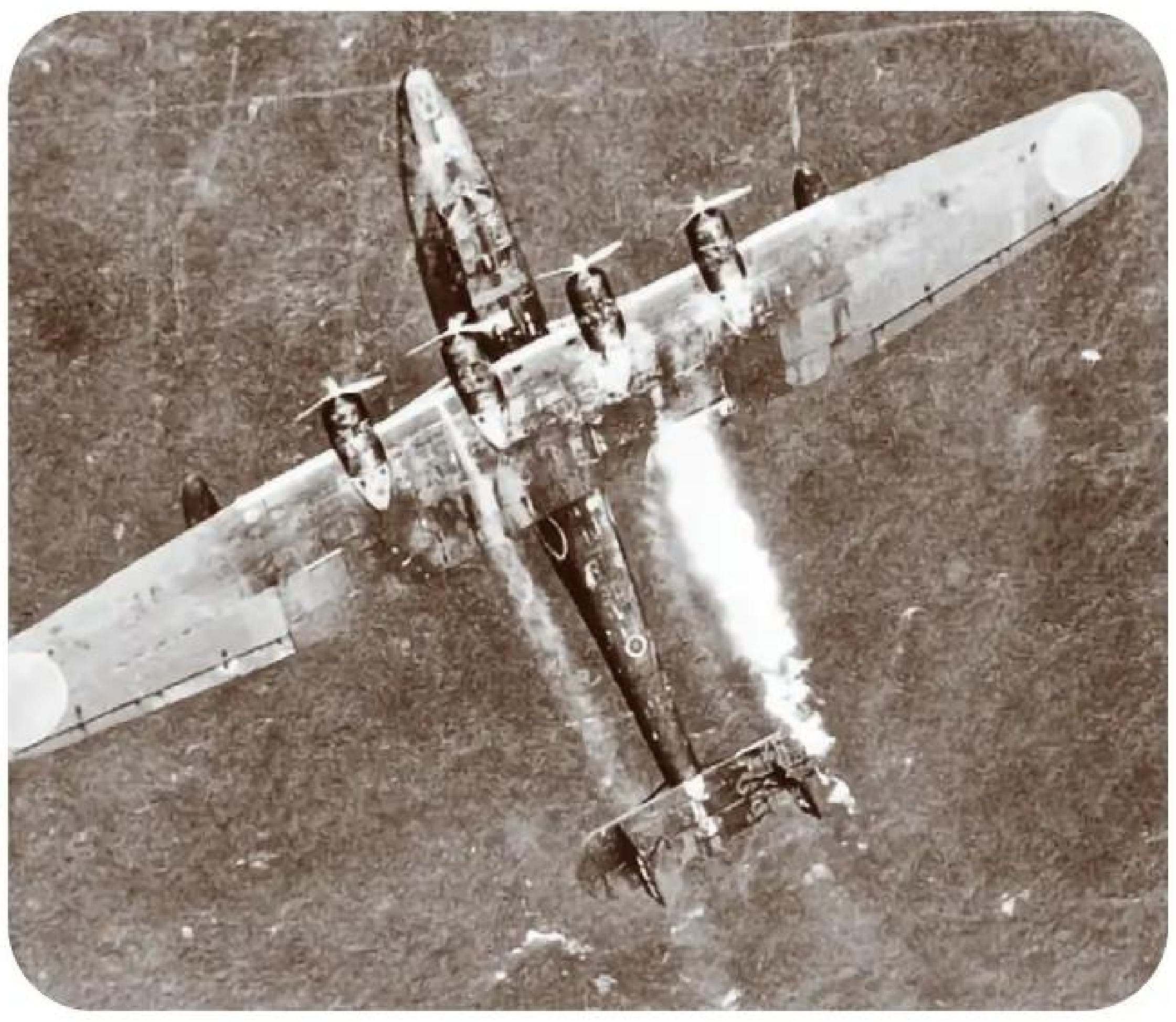

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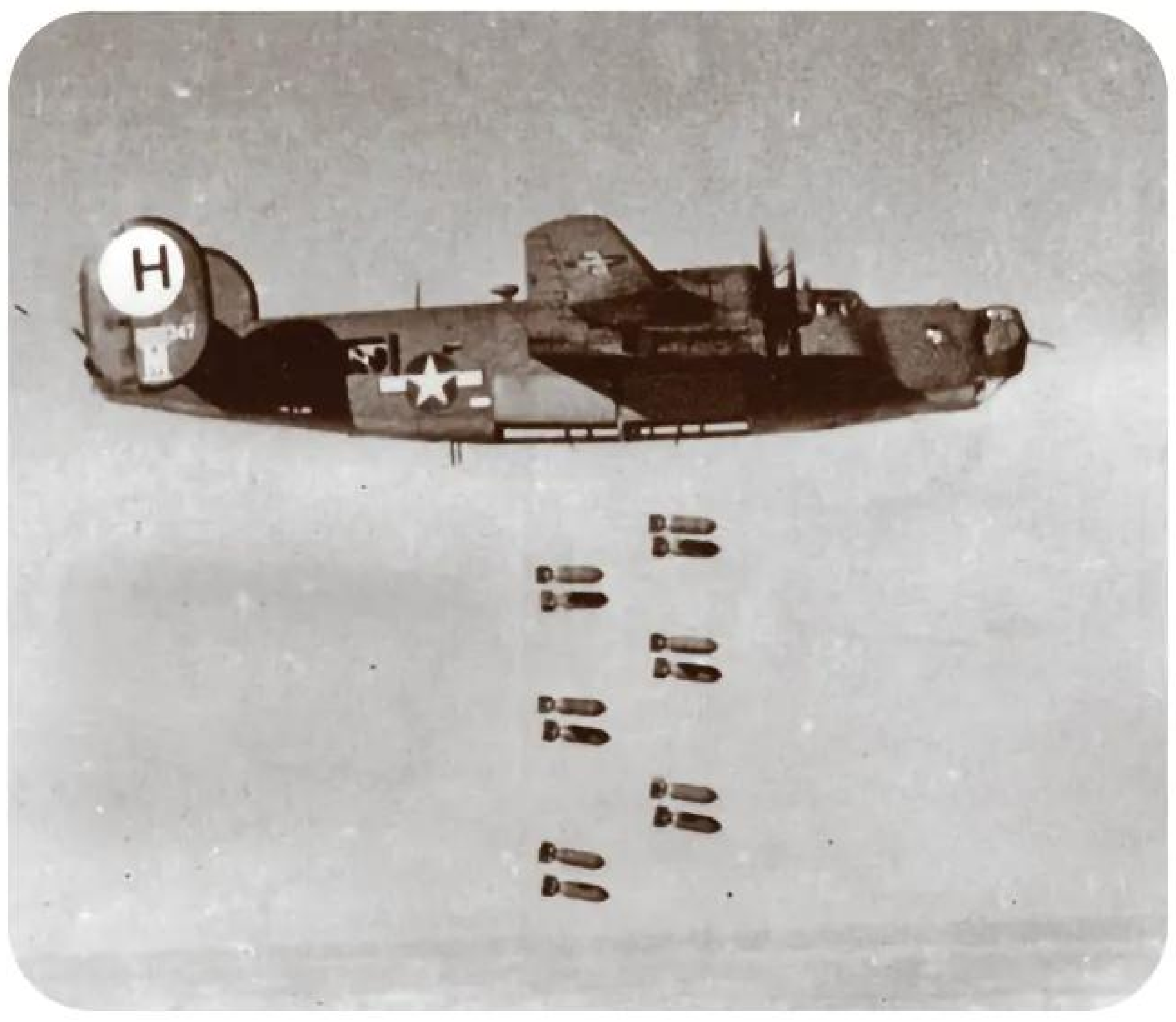

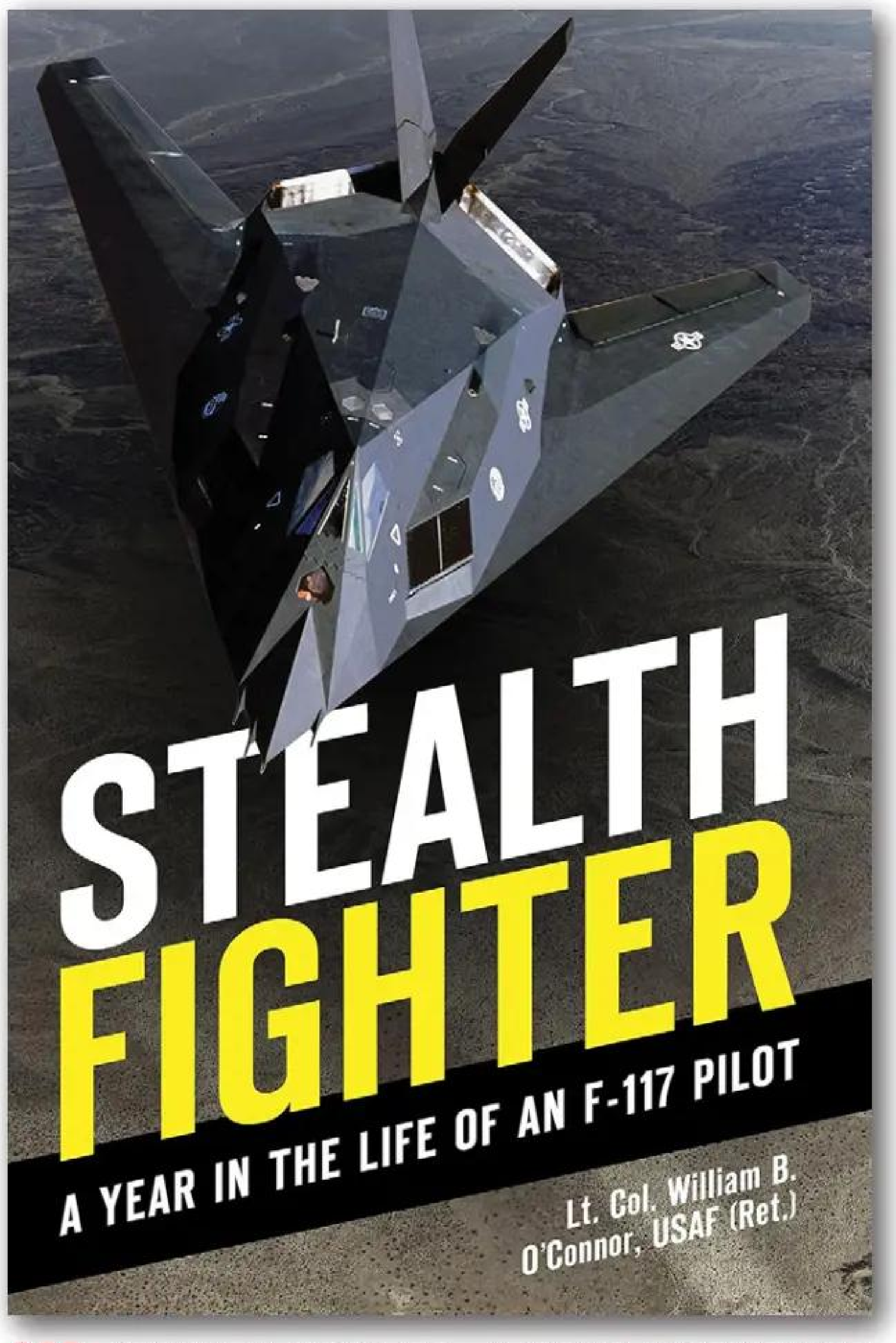

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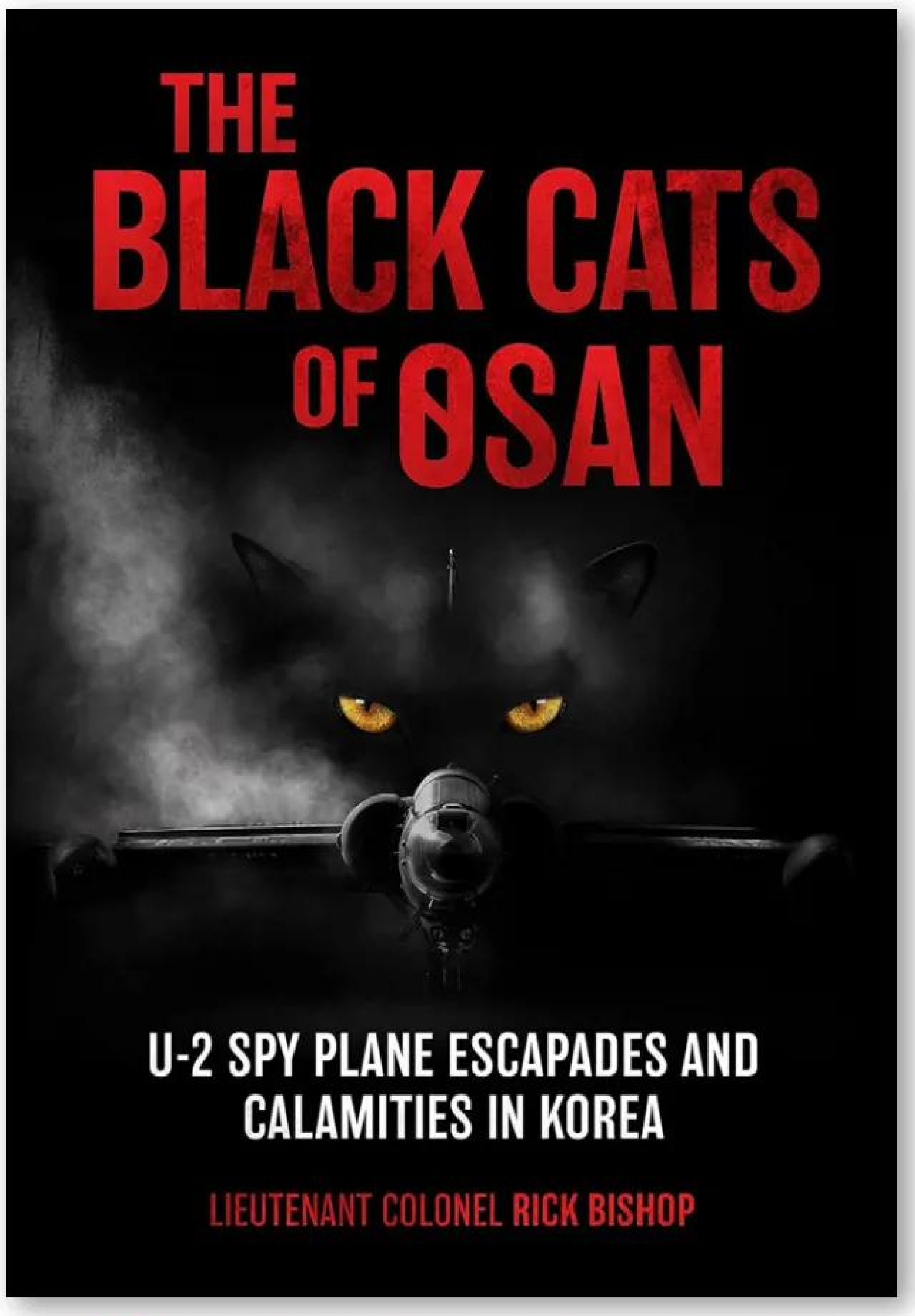

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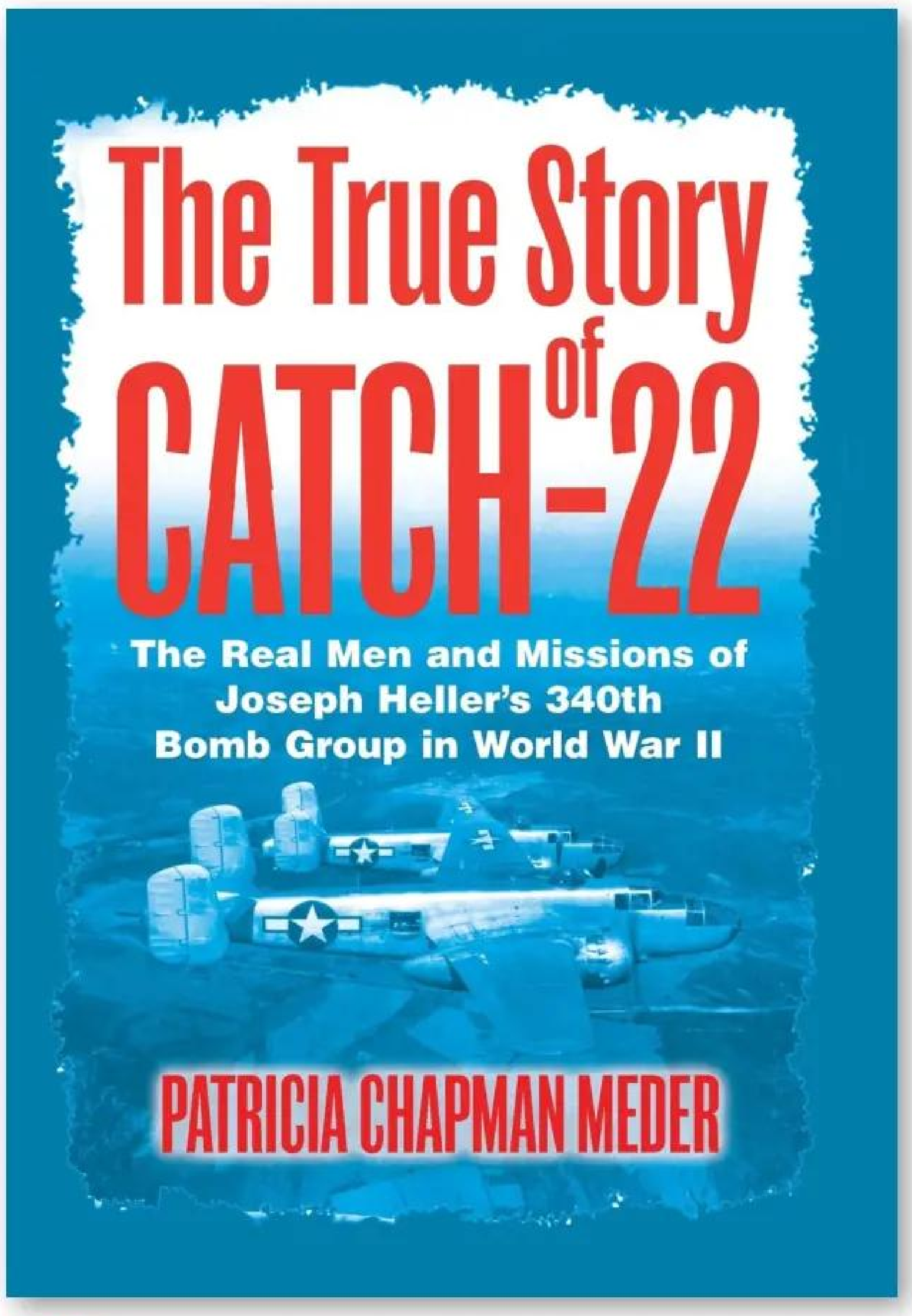

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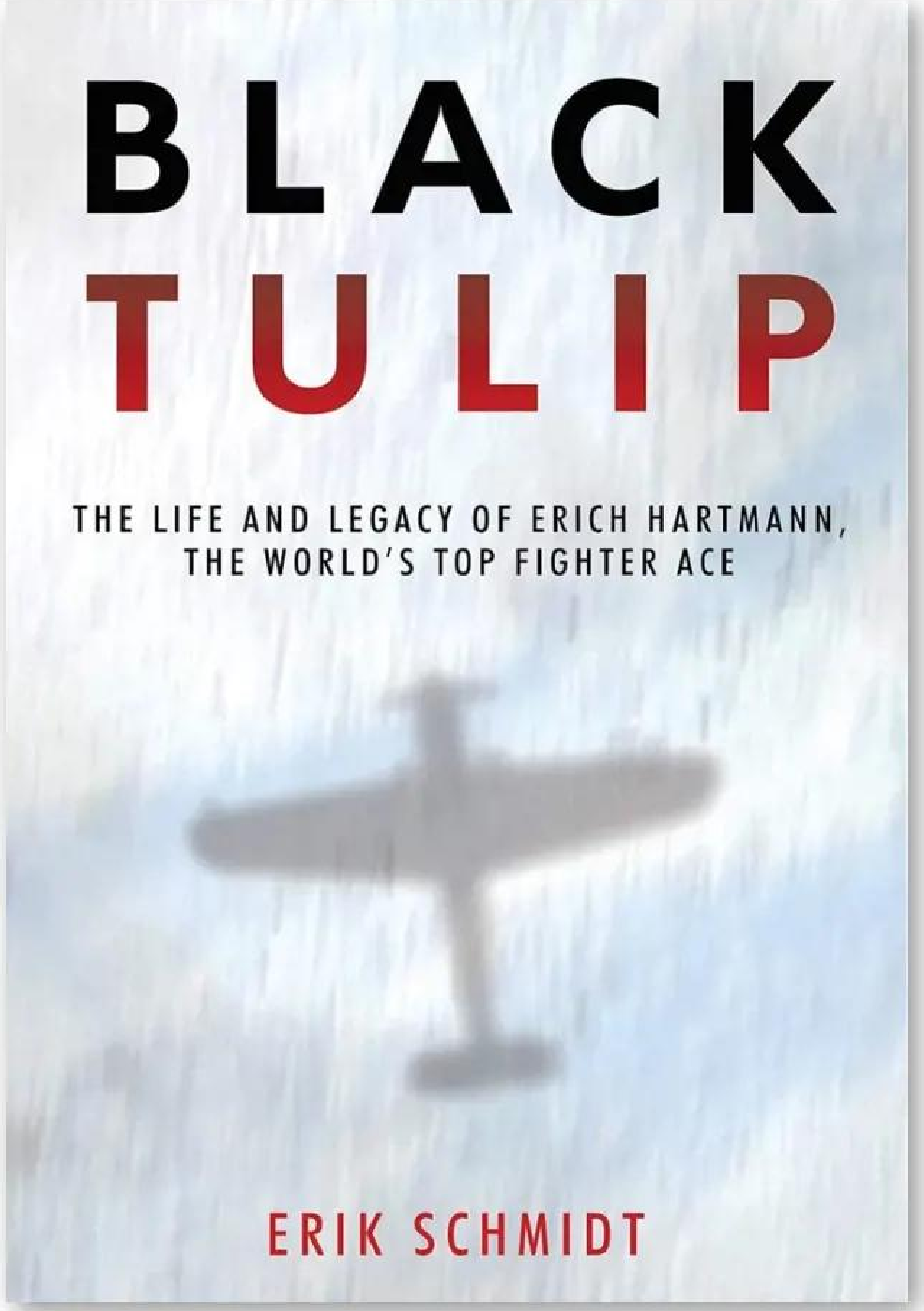

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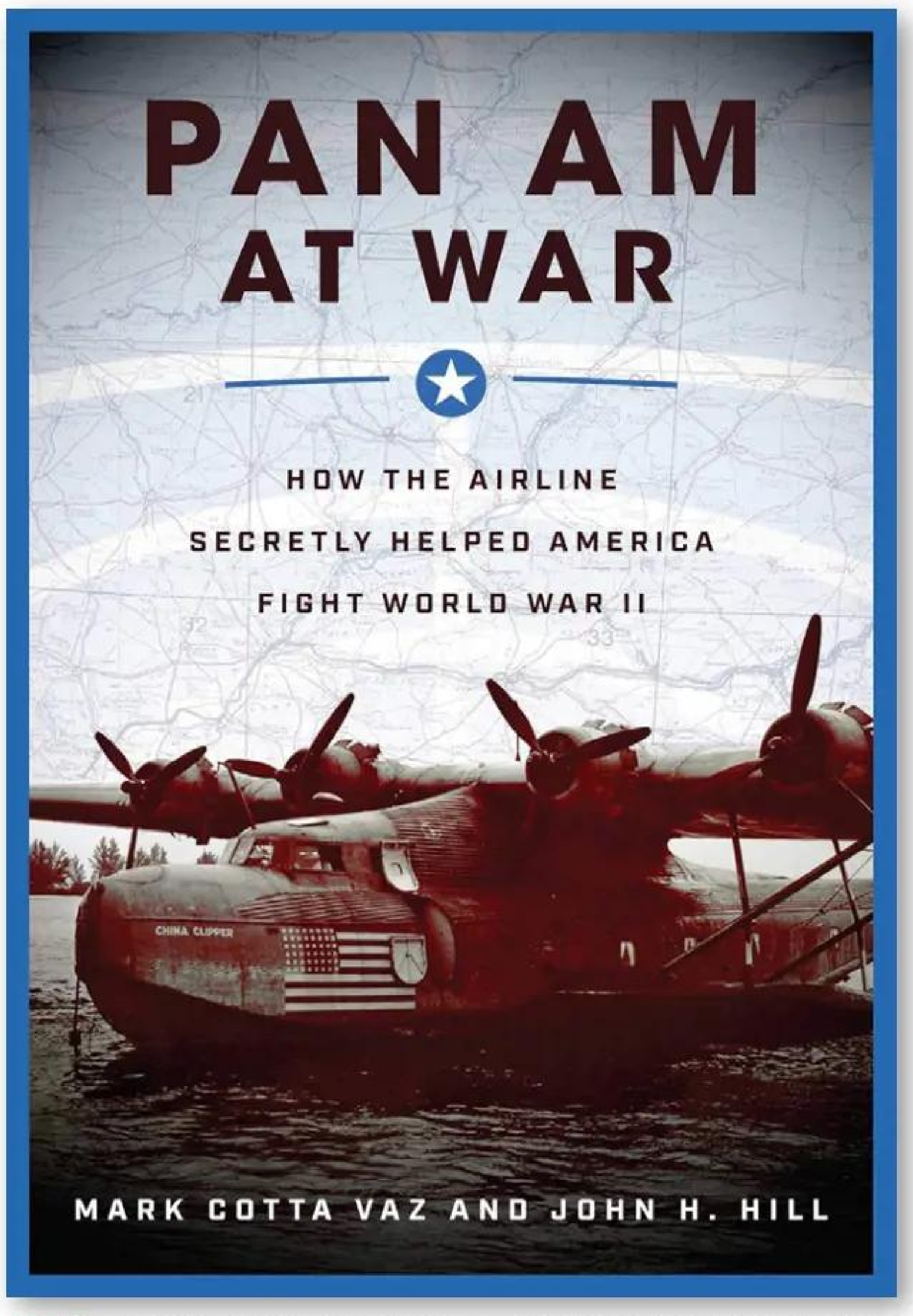

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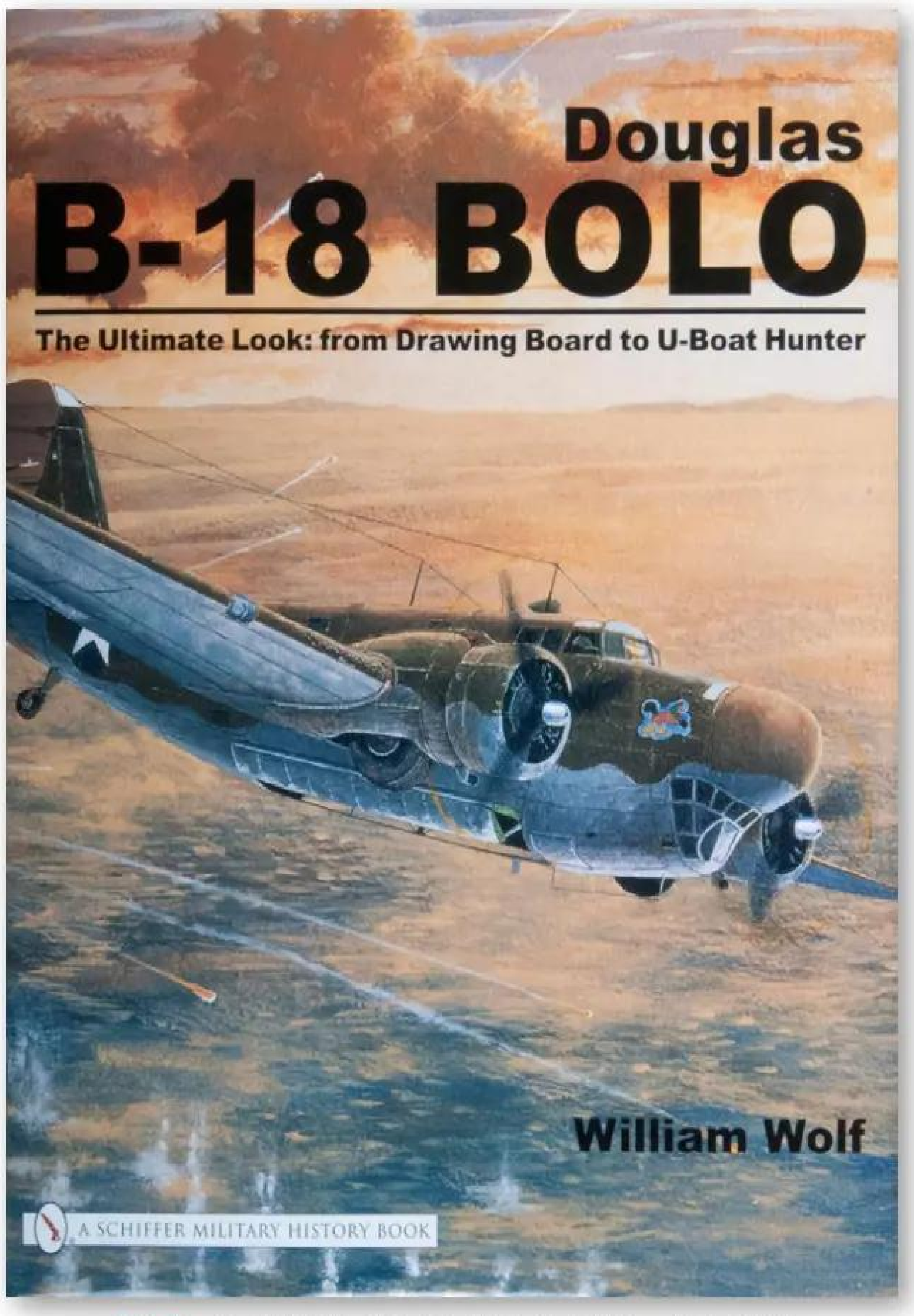

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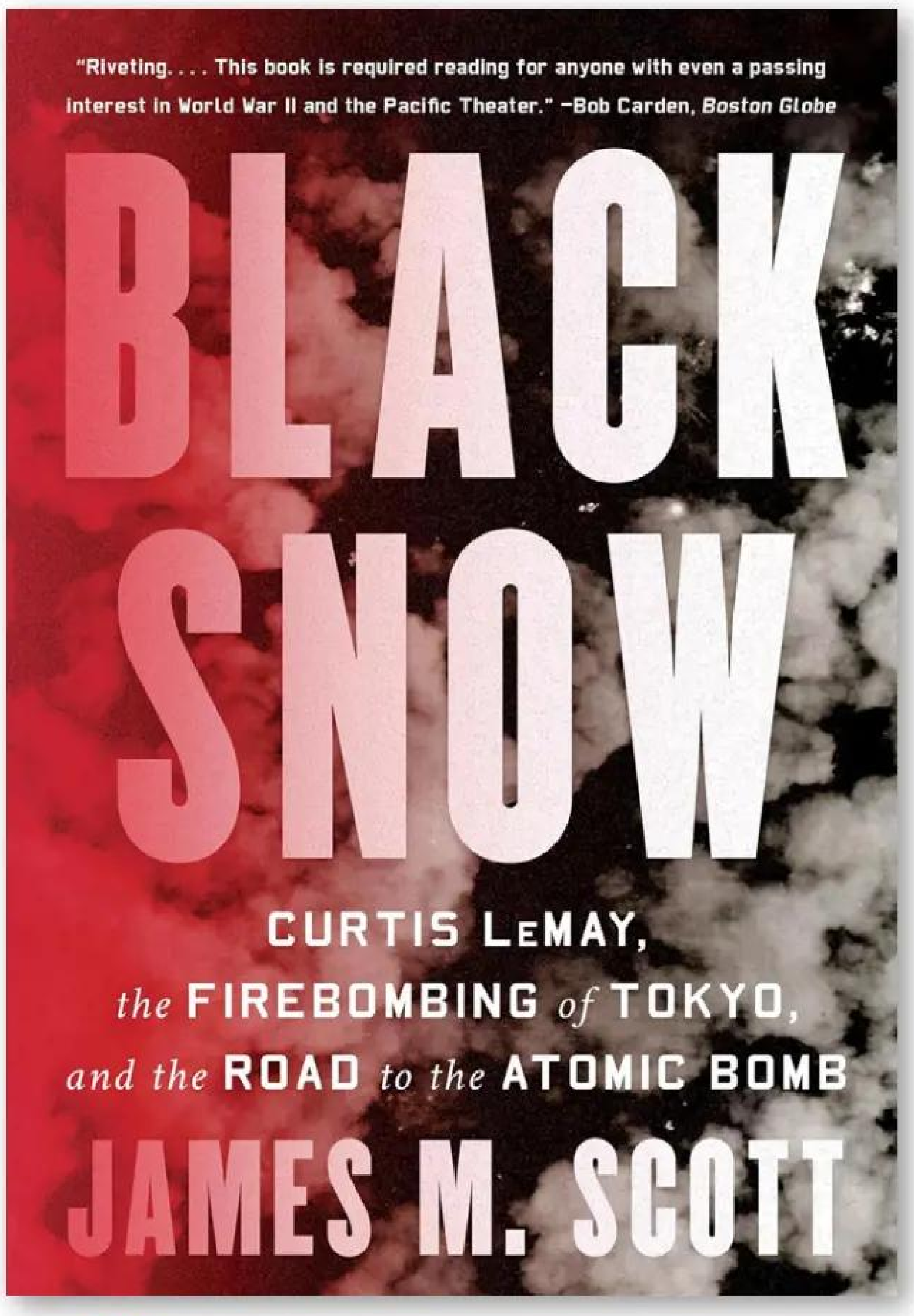
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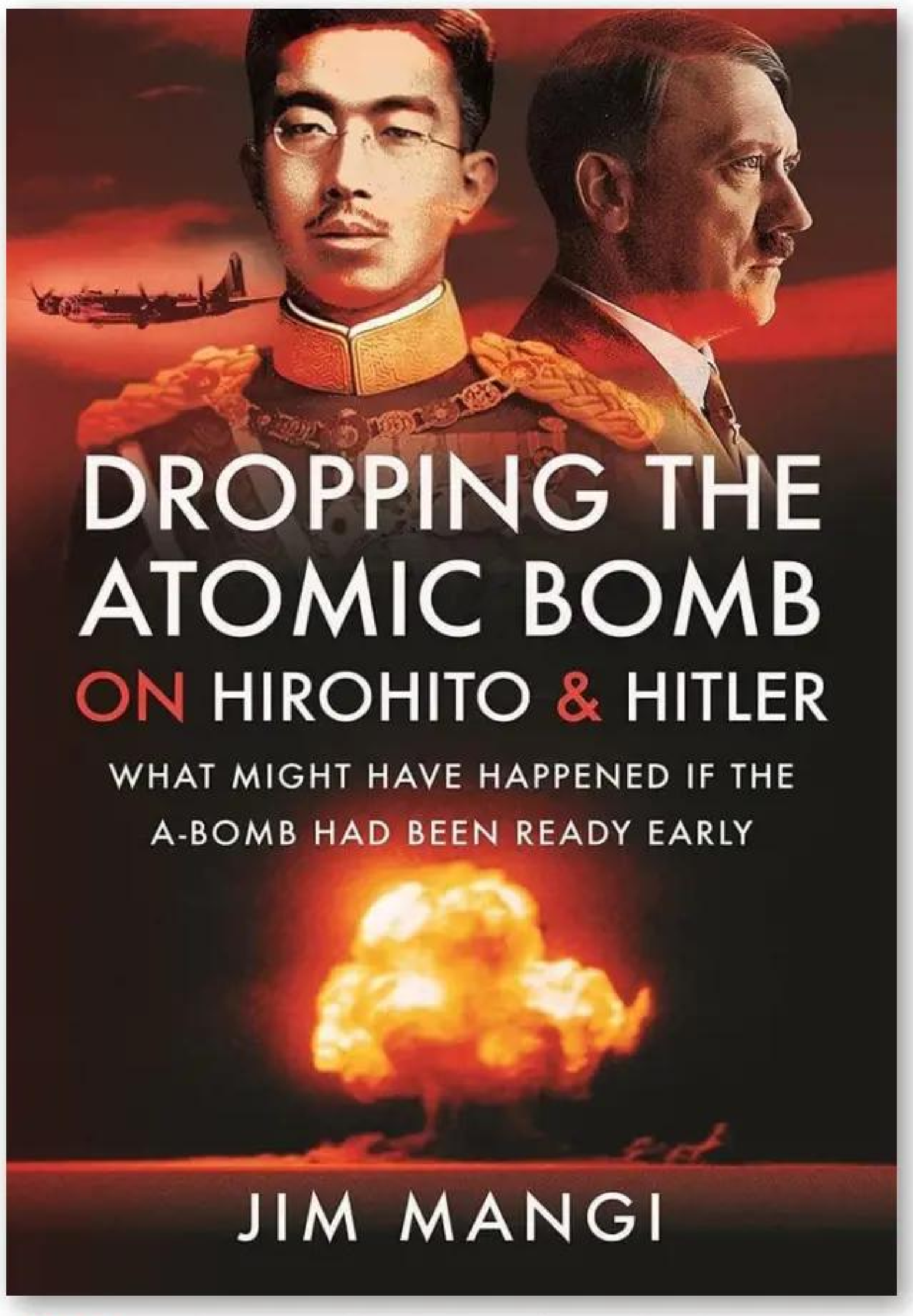
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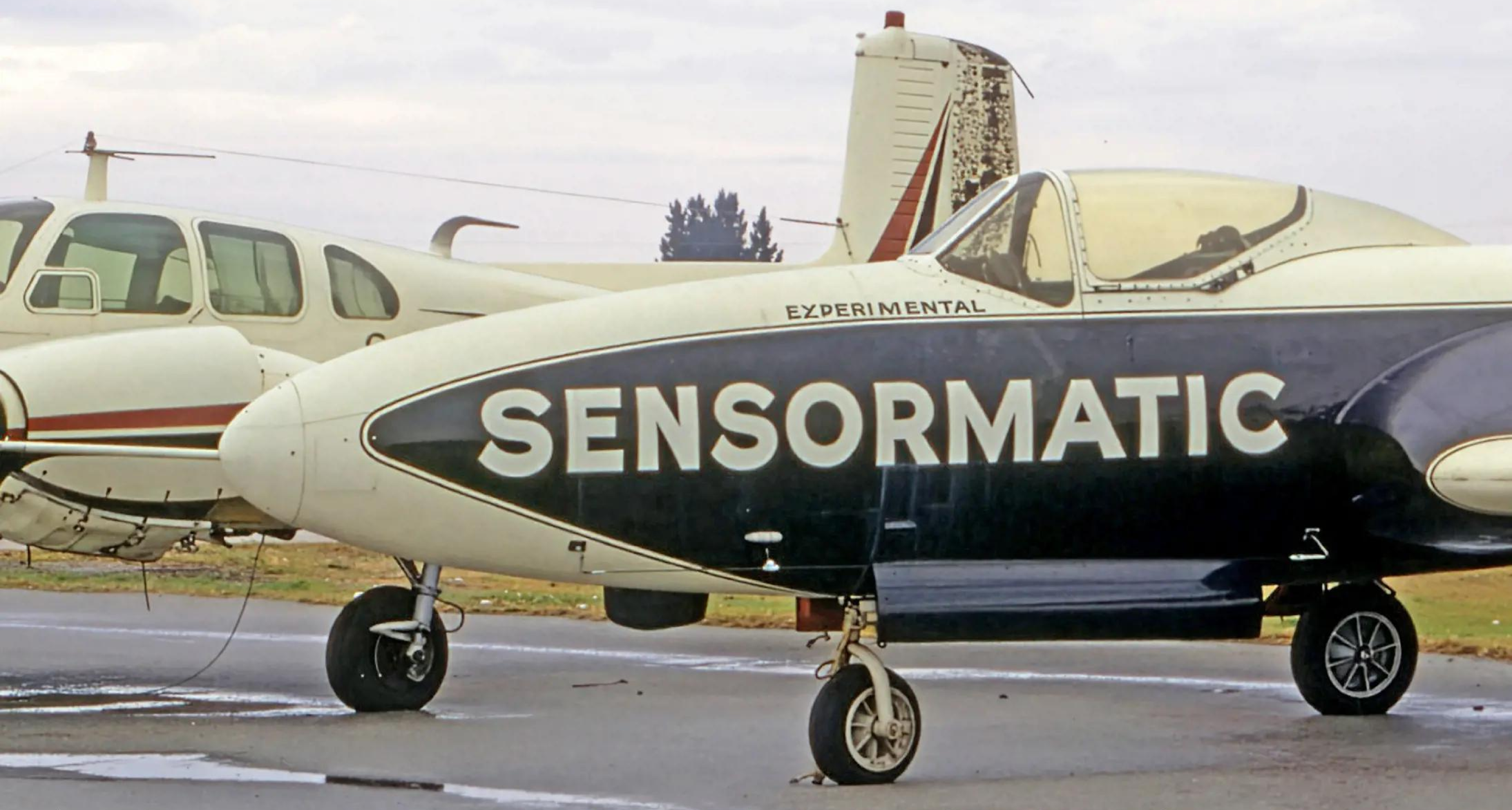
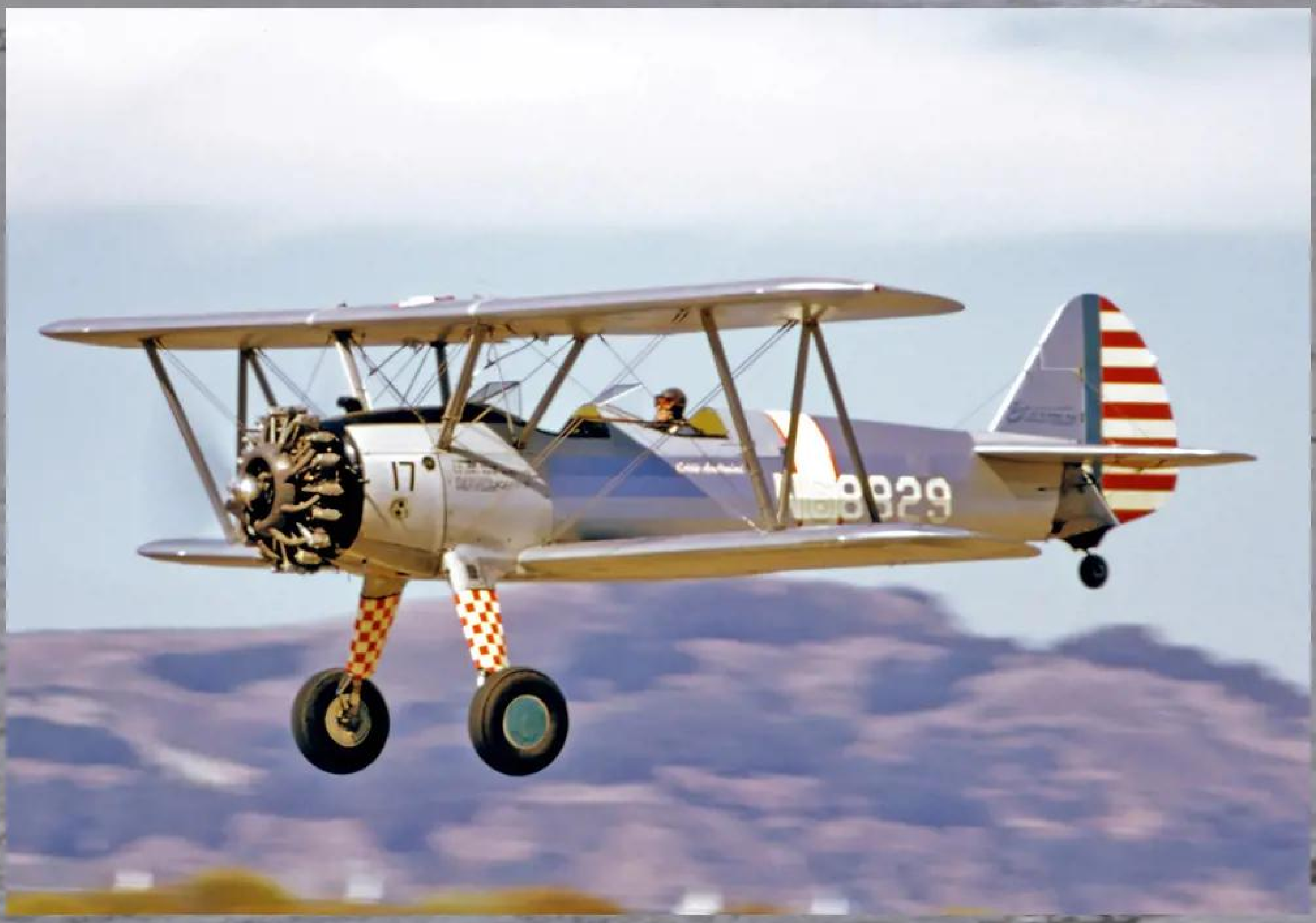
# FRIDAY NIGHT OLDIES

BY DOUG FISHER

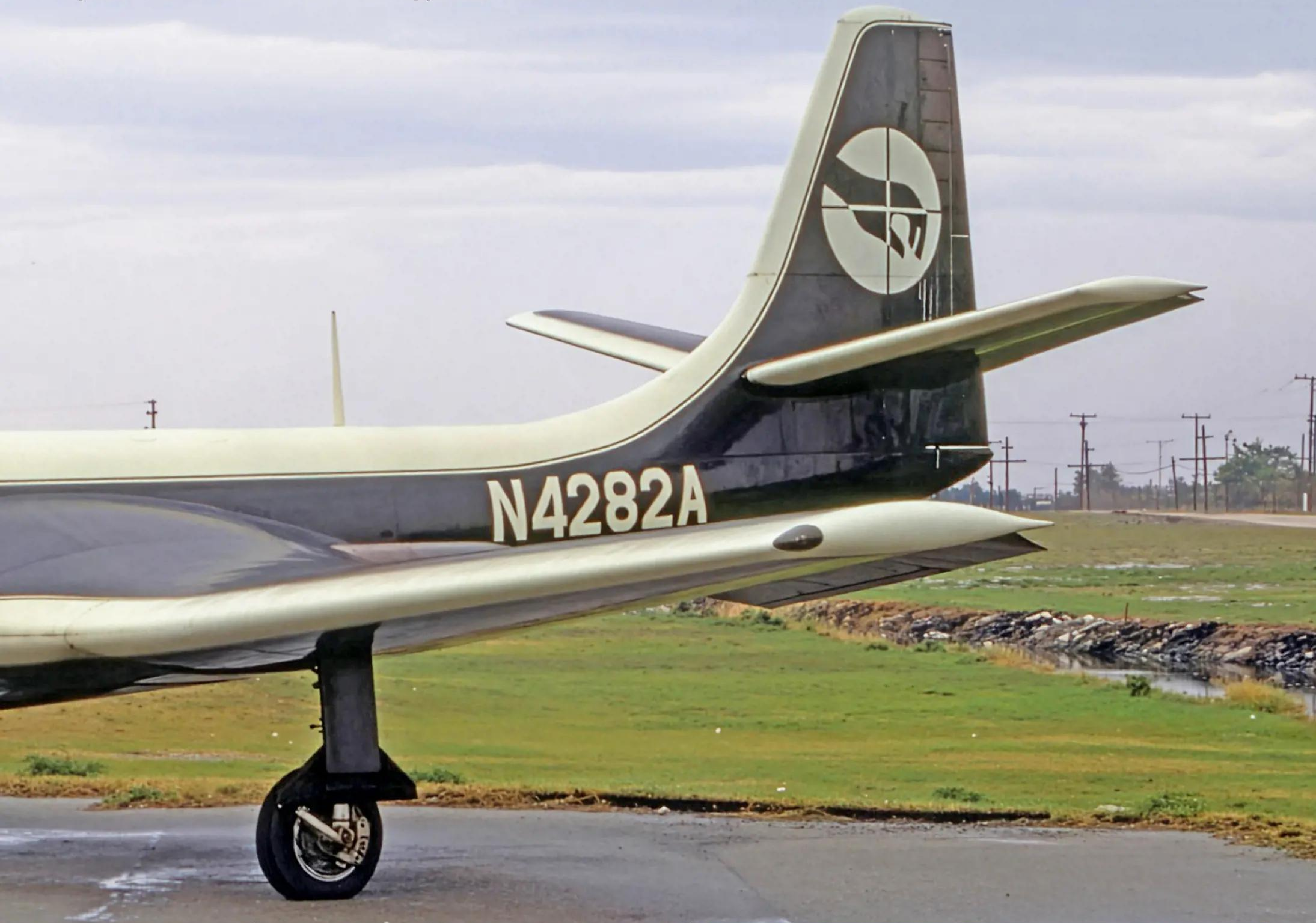
*SURPLUS MILITARY AIRCRAFT WERE SUBJECTED TO NUMEROUS MODIFICATIONS AND COLOR SCHEMES PRIOR TO BECOMING VALUED — AND EXPENSIVE — COLLECTOR ITEMS. IN THIS SEGMENT, WE PRESENT A VARIETY OF AIRCRAFT FROM LIGHT TRAINERS TO HEAVY BOMBERS.*



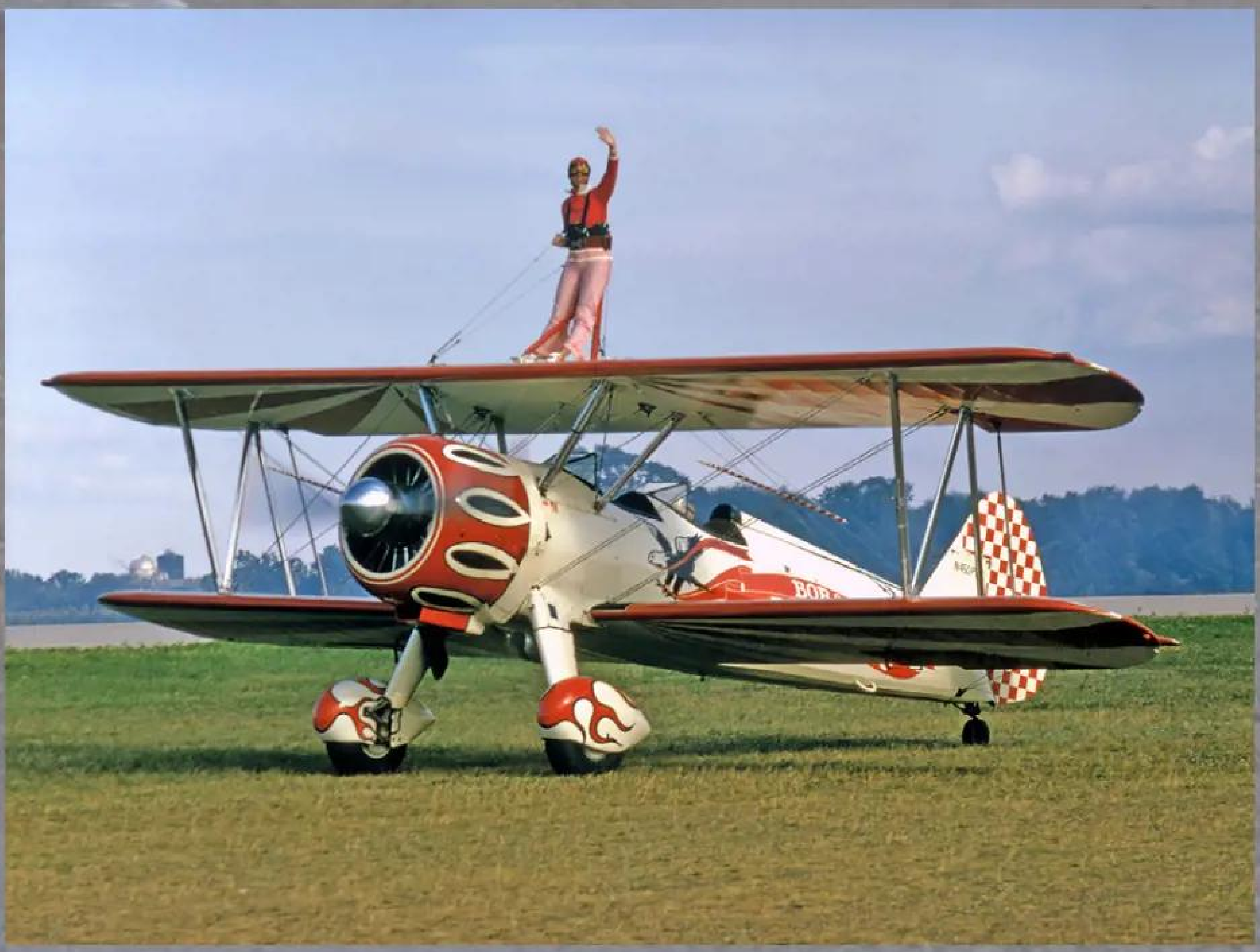


**During the 1960s/1970s, there was a "cross-over" period when ex-military aircraft received an odd blend of civilian and military markings. The Warbird Movement had not really caught on so any former military aircraft with "stars and bars" added to the fuselage and wings was looked on as a "restoration to original standards." Although lacking stars and bars, Stearman N68829 (c/n 75-5691) has a mixture of civil/military paint. Flown by the late, great Eddie Andreini, the Model 75 was photographed making a pass down the runway at Half Moon Bay, California. Powered by a Lycoming R-680-4P-B4, Eddie used the aircraft for some of his aerobatic performances but he also had a heavily-modified Stearman registered N68828 (both aircraft had been operated by pioneering crop duster Red Jensen) and he was unfortunately killed in that aircraft at Travis AFB during an airshow. The accident was survivable but the USAF fire rescue team reacted extremely slowly and Eddie died in the ensuing fire. The USAF was found guilty (and rightly so) of negligence in not having the fire-fighting equipment ready for immediate operation. The USAF was forced to pay the family $1.4 million.**

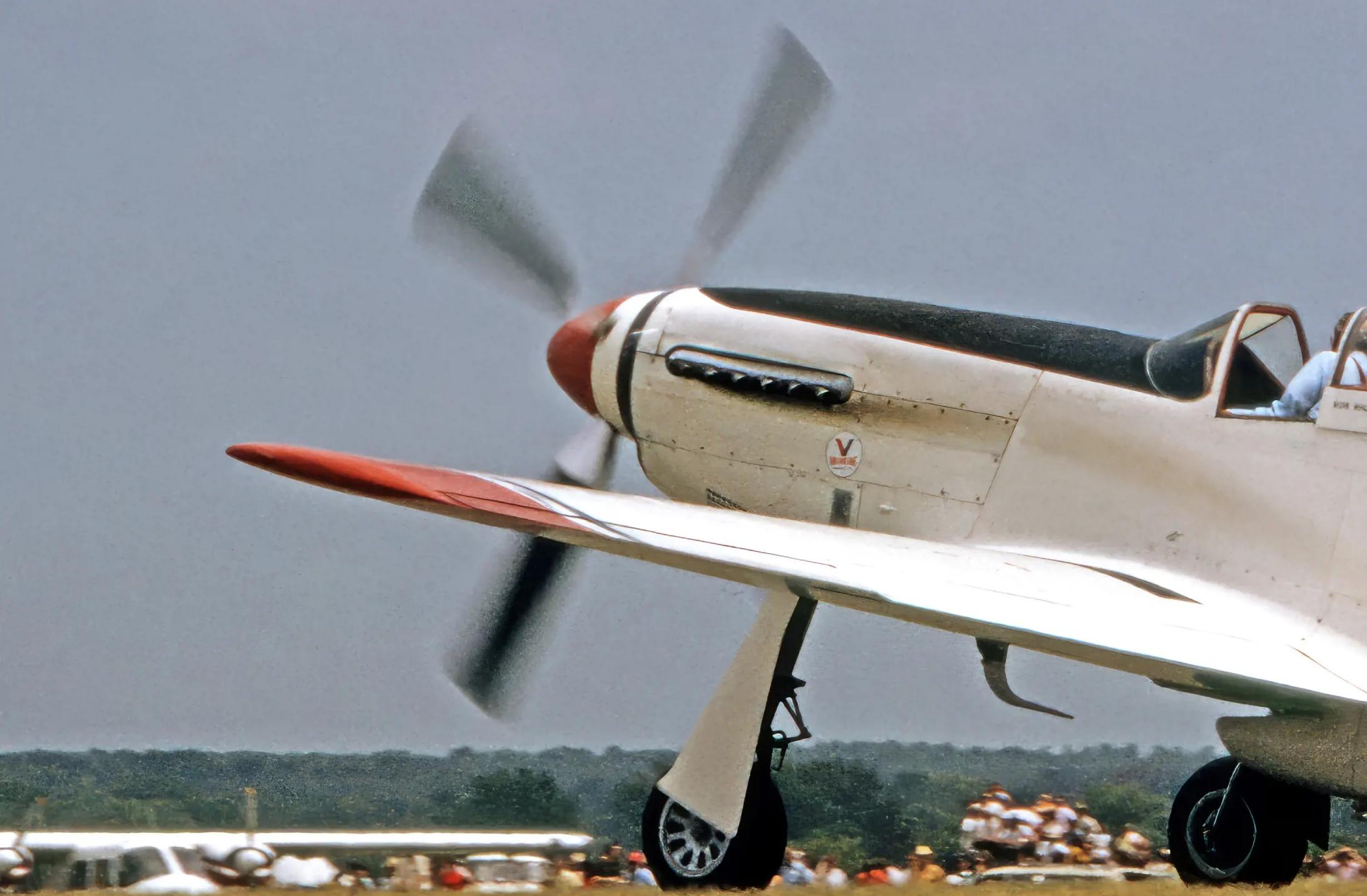
**We would not mind finding one of these parked on the ramp at our local airport. The McDonnell FH-1 Phantom was the first US designed and built jet fighter to take off and land on an American aircraft carrier — this taking place on 21 July 1946 from the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. The aircraft also became the first Navy fighter to exceed 500-mph while becoming the first jet fighter operated by the Marine Corps. Including prototypes, only 62 Phantoms were built. The FH-1 would lead to upgraded jet fighter designs for the Navy and placed McDonnell in the forefront of production. Rather surprisingly, three surplus Phantoms were purchased by Progressive Aero of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Two were civilianized and it appears that a third was kept for spares. The company had geared a program to the growing private and small airline market operating a new generation of jets. The prospective student had to have a multi-engine license and $2250 for the seven-day course. The course included classroom seminars on jet operation while the student also went through the pressure chamber at McCoy AFB. Three hours of dual control instruction were done in a Morane-Saulnier MS.760 and once this was completed, there were five solo hours in the "Progressive Phantom." When it started, Progressive claimed to have "several dozen" students but it is not known how many, if any, pilots completed the course. In this photo, N4282A (originally incorrectly applied as N2482A) carries the logo for Sensormatic, a company that built security devices but it is not known what connection the plane had with that organization. By 1966, all three planes had been taken over by a local bank. Phantom N4282A (BuNo 111761 but also listed as BuNo 111793) eventually went derelict and was acquired, restored, and placed on display at the National Museum of Naval Aviation. Progressive Phantom N4283A (BuNo 111768) pretty much suffered the same fate and is now with the Pima Air & Space Museum. It is unclear what happened to the third airframe.**

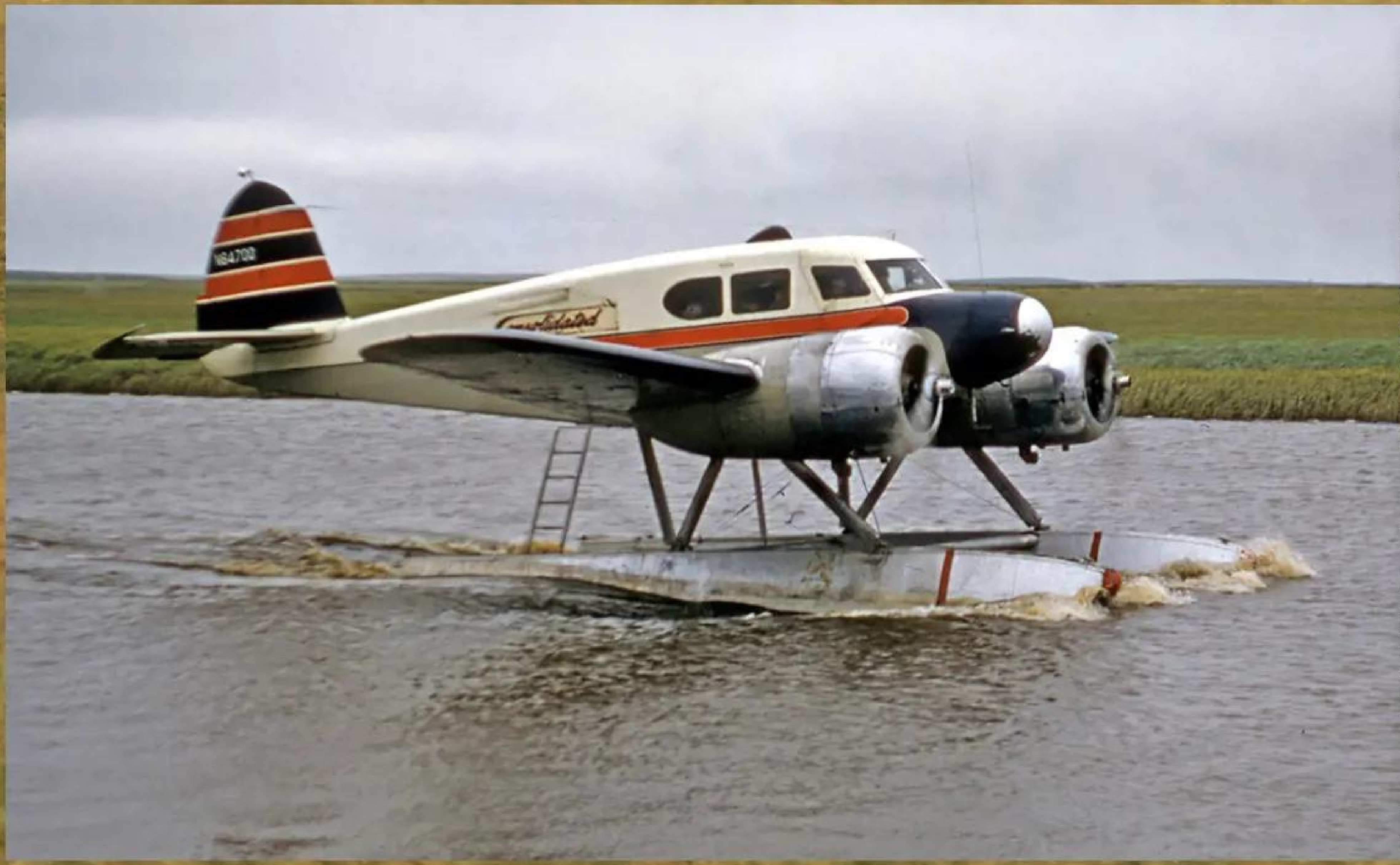


**We commented on Stearmans being utilized as wing-walking aircraft in the November 2025 issue and, over the years, numerous examples have received a variety of modifications for that type of airshow work. This photograph depicts highly modified PT-17 Kaydet 42-26458 registered as N450PW. Flown by Bob and Pat Warner, Pat is on the wing in this photo. As typical with most Stearmans, the plane served with a variety of USAAF training units, one of the last being the 2161 Base Unit out of Taylor Field, Ocala, Florida. The aircraft was sold surplus with the registration of N61932 and during the 1960s it was modified for airshows and fitted with a P&W R-985 of 450-hp along with wing-walking equipment. In 1973, it was purchased by Leon Riggs and the registration was changed to N711LR. The plane was obtained by Bob Wagner as N450PW in 1976 but on 27 February 1979 it was involved in an accident. Departing Hastings, Florida, with the destination of Pierson, Florida, the P&W radial failed in flight. The pilot managed to make a dead-stick landing in a field but hit a dirt bank during rollout. Damage was extensive. It was rebuilt and Bob and Pat flew the Kaydet in several different paint schemes and attended many airshows where Pat did her wing-walking routine. The Stearman has now been donated to the Western Antique Aircraft and Auto Museum where it is on display.**

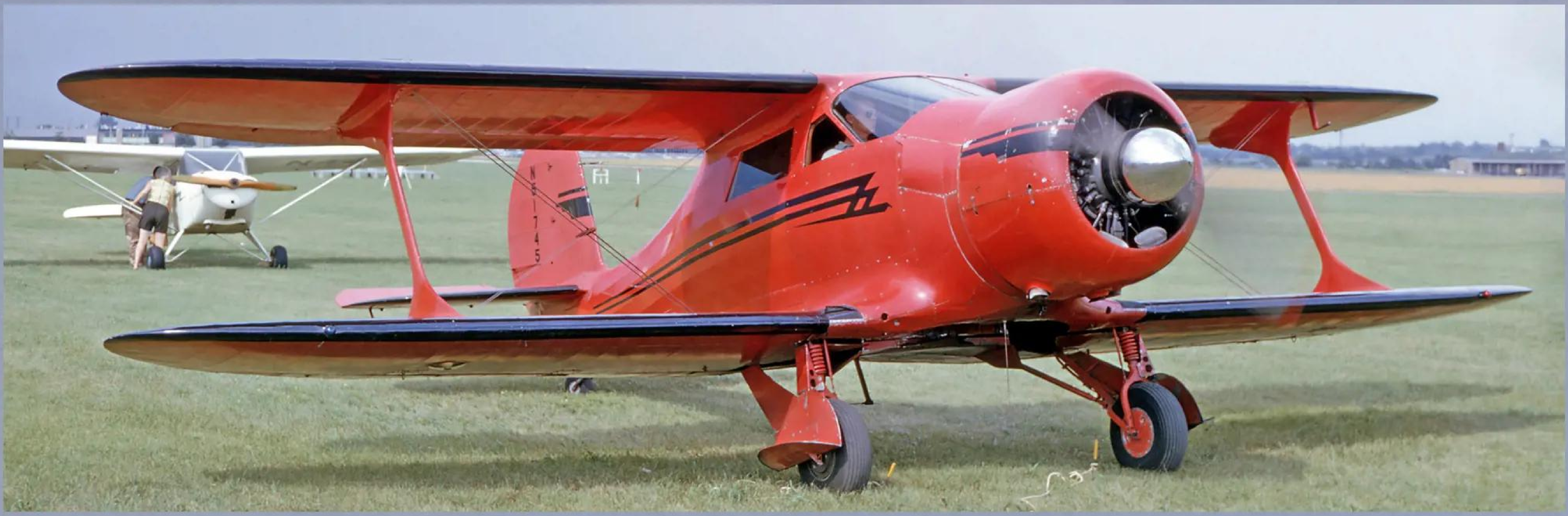


Wearing the Confederate Air Force "house" colors of white, red, and blue, pilot Gerald Swayze taxis for takeoff in NAA P-51D N835J during 1967. We are not exactly certain how it came to be that the CAF painted its fighters in this standardized scheme but when the planes were gathered together at a show, they certainly looked quite nice. Built at Inglewood as P-51D-25-NA USAAF 44-73849, the Mustang saw limited use before being put into storage. The aircraft was selected for transfer to the Royal Canadian Air Force and it was overhauled by the USAF before becoming RCAF 9247 on 6 December 1950. In RCAF service, it would fly with No. 416 (Auxiliary) "City of Oshawa" Squadron and No. 420 (Auxiliary) "City of London" Squadron. On 26 August 1956, it was one of five Mustangs put into long-term outside storage with No. 6 Repair Deport at Tenton. By 1958, it was awaiting disposal, and like the majority of RCAF Mustangs, it was surplused — initially to Intercontinental Airways before going to Aero Enterprises and becoming N6519D. The registration was soon changed to N835J and the plane went through four owners until being obtained by Swayze and flown in CAF markings. The next owner was Dr. Bill Harrison, one of the leading lights of the Warbird Movement and the N# changed to N51WH. Harrison did not keep the plane long and in 1974 it went to Jack LeVine and became a "Warbird." By that, we meant it received a variety of incorrect military markings, squadron code LH*J to reflect the owner's initials, and a new N# of N51JL. On 17 November 1984, the pilot unfortunately took the Mustang out for a flight near New Haven, Michigan. He put his nurse in the back seat and away they went. The 50-year-old pilot was a doctor and knew he was suffering from advanced heart disease and high blood pressure. He was also under stress from the death of a close friend in another P-51 crash. Even with this serious medical condition, he decided to impress his nurse (according to another friend, this was her first aircraft ride and she left five children) and began flying extremely low to the ground while maneuvering and then, according to investigators, initiated a loop. While attempting to recover from the loop, the Mustang hit a cable, then struck the ground before crashing through a building and finally disintegrating in a potato field.



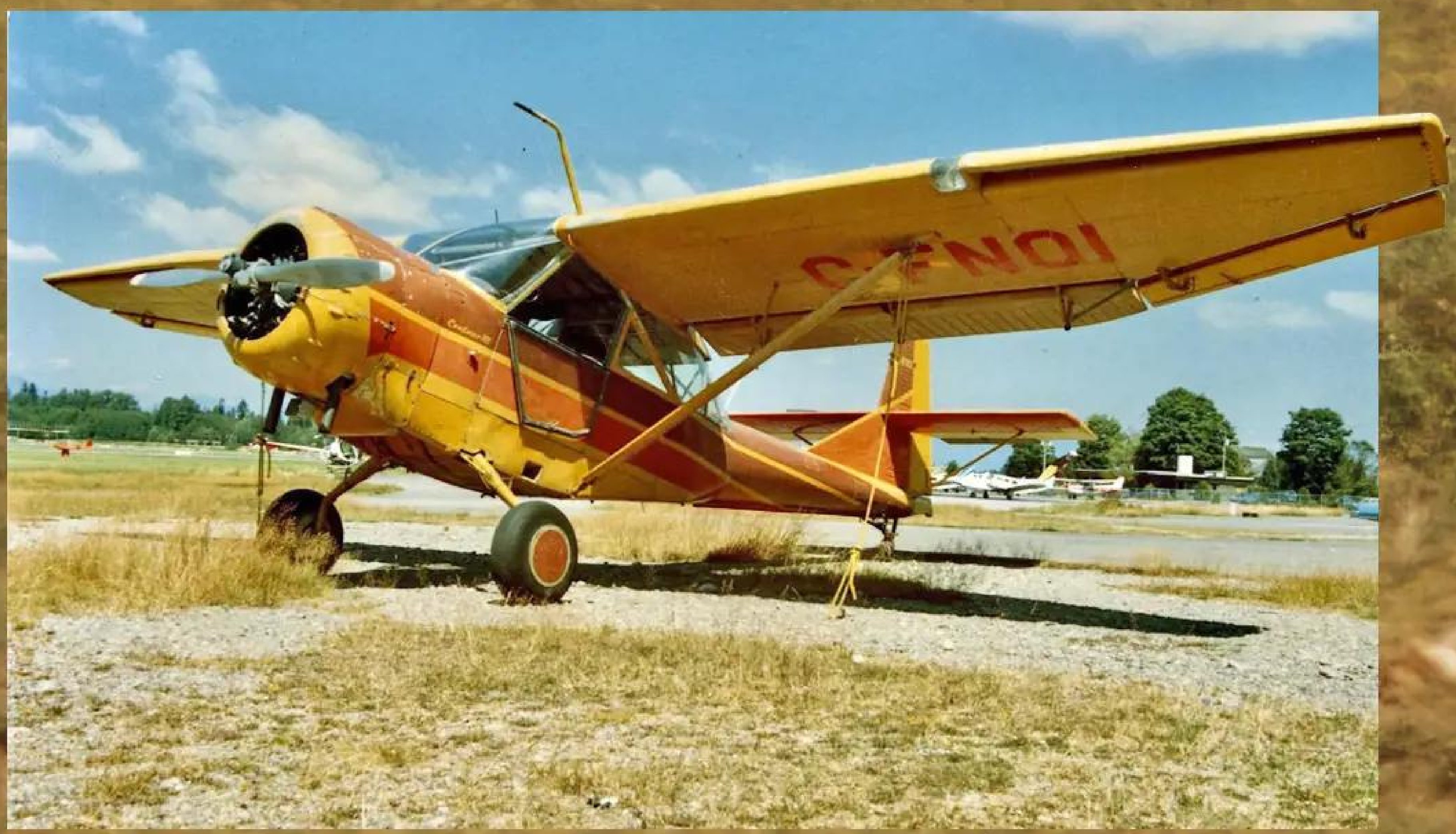


During the late 1940s and 1950s, several STC modifications were available to convert Cessna Bamboo Bombers to business aircraft and mini-airliners. There were several thousand UC-78s available for surplus sale out of the 5422 built. The pre-war T-50 Standard Airworthiness Certificate could be utilized, meaning they were in the desirable Standard Category and could easily be utilized for passenger and cargo operations. One of the modifications included installation of EDO 61-5870 floats, making the Cessna into a craft that could be used in undeveloped areas such as Alaska where runways were scarce. Northern Consolidated Airways purchased eight Bamboo Bombers including N64700, which is seen taxiing in at Chevak, Alaska, during July 1955. On 1 September 1968, N64700 was approaching Stevens Village, Alaska, for landing when the #1 engine failed. The pilot (the only person aboard) misjudged his distance and altitude, hit trees, and came down in the water where it sank.

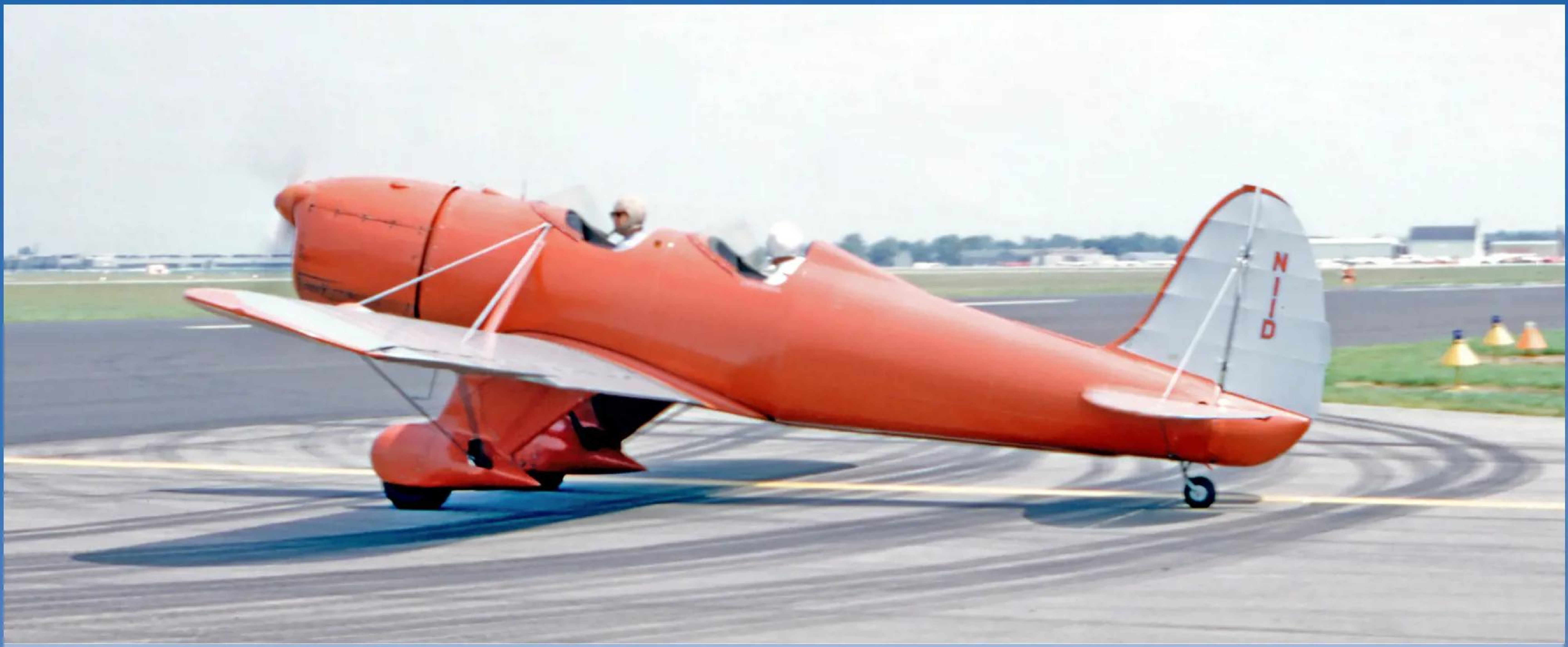


**Numerous examples of today's surviving Beech Staggerwings were either built for military use or were impressed into service following Pearl Harbor. One such aircraft was Beech D17S N51745 (c/n 4886). The plane was built in for the USAAF as a UC-43-BH 43-10838 and delivered on 30 March 1943 and was flown to Salinas AAB in California. On 4 May of that year, it went to Newark AAF in New Jersey. This was the location where many military aircraft were shipped to England so there is the possibility it was heading to the Royal Air Force. However, it was wrecked on landing when pilot Arthur Lindsley applied too much brake and the aircraft went up on its nose and onto its back. The Staggerwing was repaired and on 5 September 1945 it was with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and offered for surplus sale. It was sold in 1947 as D17S NC51745 and went through several owners until being noted as wrecked during 1969 in Caifornia. It was purchased by a South Carolina salvage company and offered for sale. In 1970, a new owner bought the aircraft and began the rebuild of the D17S. In 1978, the registration was changed to N51MM and restoration was completed in 1979. On 25 Februrary 2013, the registration was cancelled and no further information can be found.**

N835J
CONFEDERATE AIR FORCE



**During the 1960s, numerous Convair L-13s could be found scattered at southern California airports. For example, at Burbank Airport the surplus company of Grosso & Grosso had about a dozen L-13s still in USAF markings and fitted with their original Franklin engines. At Torrance Airport, Roger Keeney's Acme Aircraft was converting the planes to Acme Centaur 101s with more powerful engines and numerous other upgrades that made them into great sport/bush planes. One such aircraft was USAF 47-290 that became Centaur 101 CF-NOI. The plane had a 300-horsepower Lycoming R-680 installed along with an interior that could accommodate six passengers. Photographed at Langley, British Columbia, the plane's serial was changed to 47-290-3 to indicate this was the third Centaur. The plane was sold in the USA as N4062H during 2003. Michael O'Leary recalls: "During the 1960s/1970s, our little group of aviation enthusiasts used to visit various airports including Torrance and we would always stop by Acme. Roger Keeney was an absolutely delightful individual — full of enthusiasm and love of aviation. He would drop whatever he was doing and pull interesting aircraft out of the hangar so we could take photos while he ran the engines. These varied from Bearcats, Centaurs, to C-82s. Then he would fill us in on information regarding the particular plane. Today, unfortunately, very few people in aviation are like Roger."**



Few light aircraft of the 1930s define the term “classic” better than the Ryan ST-A series of sport planes. Built during the Great Depression for the wealthy civilian pilot, the ST-A, with its great good looks and aerobatic prowess, was an instant success. However, the world was marching towards war and many nations needed trainers and if such planes could be armed, then all the better. The ST-A had the ability to mount light machine guns, be fitted with floats, and tote small bombs. One of the countries looking for such a plane was Guatemala and that nation placed an order for a dozen ST-A production aircraft modified for military use with the *Cuerpo de Aeronautica Guatemalteca*. Six of the machines were completed as single-seater fighters fitted with .303-caliber Lewis machine guns mounted in a blister on the upper surface of each wing panel. They were delivered in two batches in July 1938 and January 1939 with FAG serials 21 to 32. The first six were shipped from Los Angeles on 15 June 1938 aboard MV *Wyoming* accompanied by Ryan chief pilot Paul Wilcox who supervised assembly and acceptance test flights. In 1958, the seven survivors were acquired by Dick Spenser in Florida. The aircraft were disassembled and loaded into a Curtiss C-46 and flown to St. Petersburg then offered for sale. The ST-A that became N11D (FAG serial not known) was photographed prior to takeoff with owner Bill Dodd, an aerobatic pilot of the time period. The former military aircraft was given an attractive orange/white scheme and in 1970 he changed the N# to N302D. The next owner was Jimmy Rollason of Vacaville, California. Michael O’Leary comments: “Jimmy is extremely well-known in the vintage aviation community and over the years has owned a wide variety of aircraft. We recently had the pleasure of visiting with Jimmy at his base at Yolo Country Airport in California [one of the airfields used by the Doolittle Raiders for short-takeoff practice flights] and we will be featuring an article on Jimmy and his planes in an upcoming issue.” Jimmy sold the plane to Jeff Trappett in Australia and it became VH-RYS and joined the community of “down under” Ryans.

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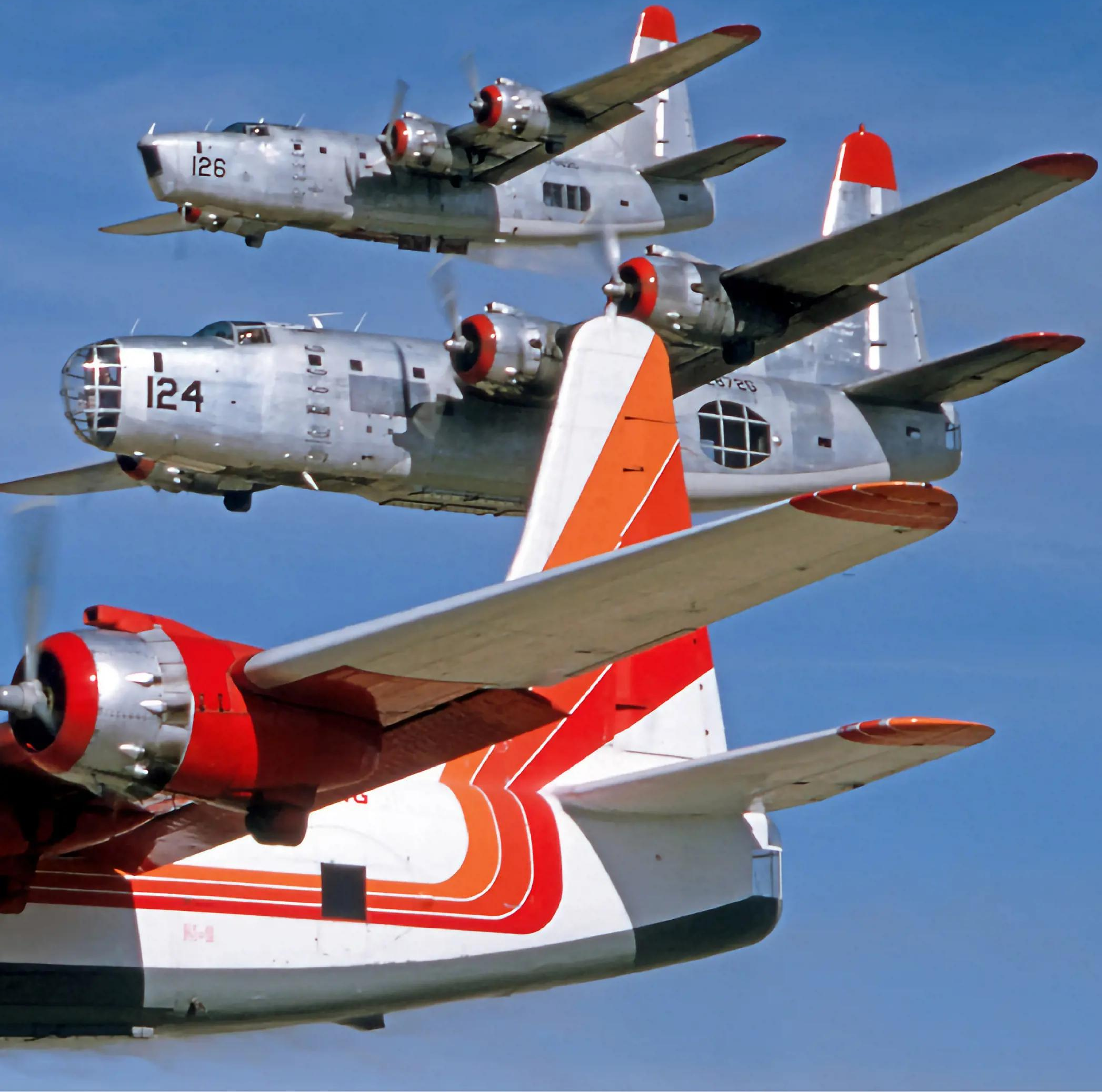
RESTRICTED

Working girls heading out to earn their keep. As we noted in the last issue of *Air Classics*, part of the fleet of stored “Big Props” at Greybull, Wyoming, was basically seized by the local bureaucrats for back tie-down fees and placed for auction. Realistically, there was no market for these historic veterans. The bureacrats stated they were owned nearly a half million dollars in tie-down money. When it was all over and the dust had settled, the county received a whopping $50,000+. Happy days were here again. There was dancing in the streets of Greybull. Celebratory fireworks exploded throughout the night sky. Bands paraded down Main Street. Good times were back and the money was rolling in. Well, not really. The $50,000+ was probably quickly eaten up by bureaucratic salaries and scrapping of some of the planes started as soon as the ink was dry on the contracts. As Editor Michael O’Leary noted, making the world’s largest collection of surviving Big Props into some sort of money-generating attraction would have not only brought in visitors from literally around the globe



(Europeans in particular deeply interested in such things) and those funds could have aided the airport while also helping the town's restaurants and motels on the verge of shutting down. I doubt if anyone could have ever accused the good *oberburgermeisters* of Greybull as being far-thinkers but there certainly could have been a better, and more profitable, solution than creating a few thousands more beer cans. We decided to run this photograph of an event that will never again be repeated — three Hawkins & Powers Privateers being led by Tanker 121 Captain Bob West with Milo Peltzer sitting in the right seat followed by Tanker 124 and Tanker 126. Hawkins & Powers was the largest operator of the Privateer and the aircraft were extremely effective in the role of aerial fire-bomber. Government interference classified the aircraft as "antique" and this put H&P, along with several other companies, almost immediately out of business. This left our nation without an effective heavy tanker force for over a year. **AC**

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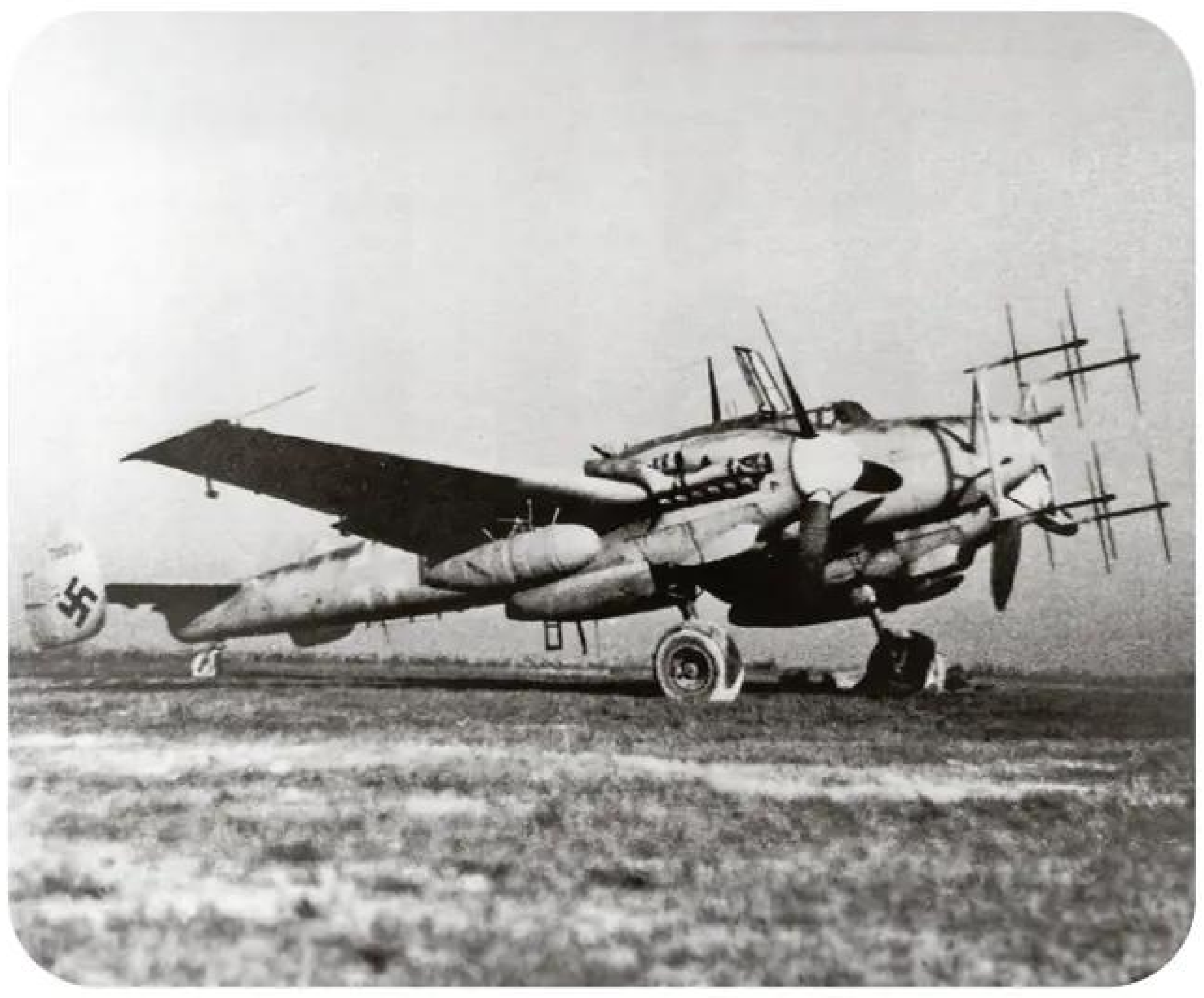

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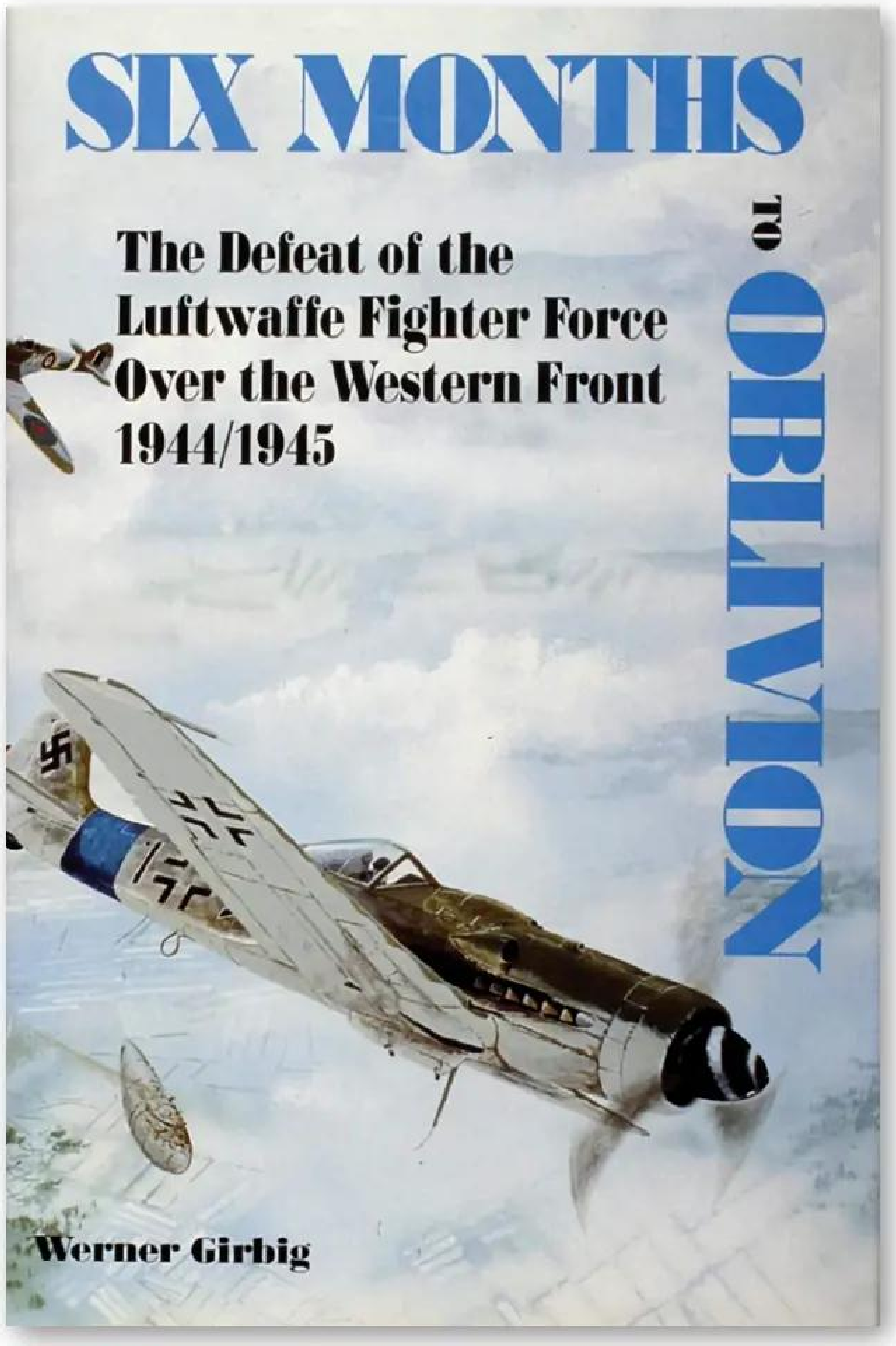
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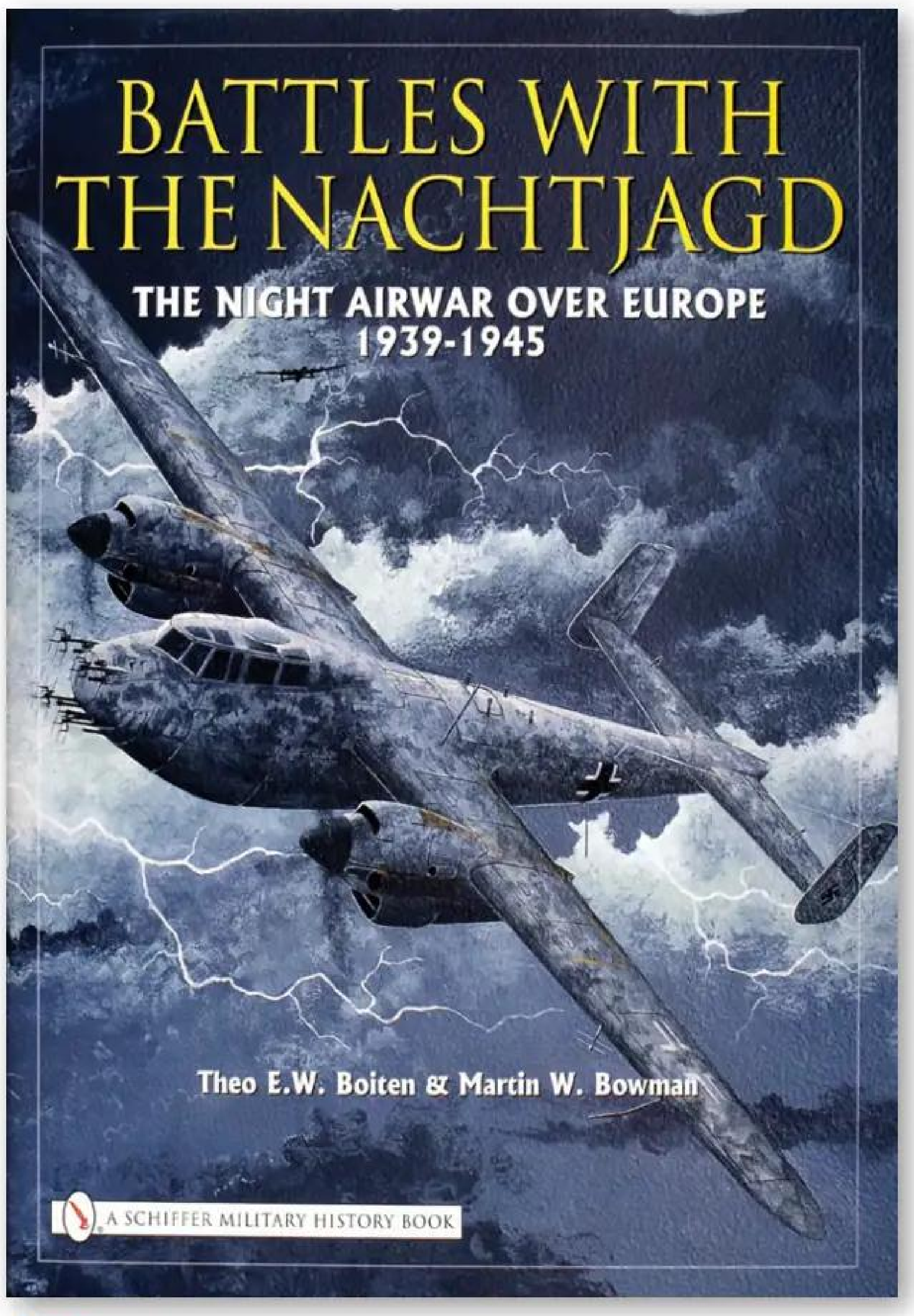
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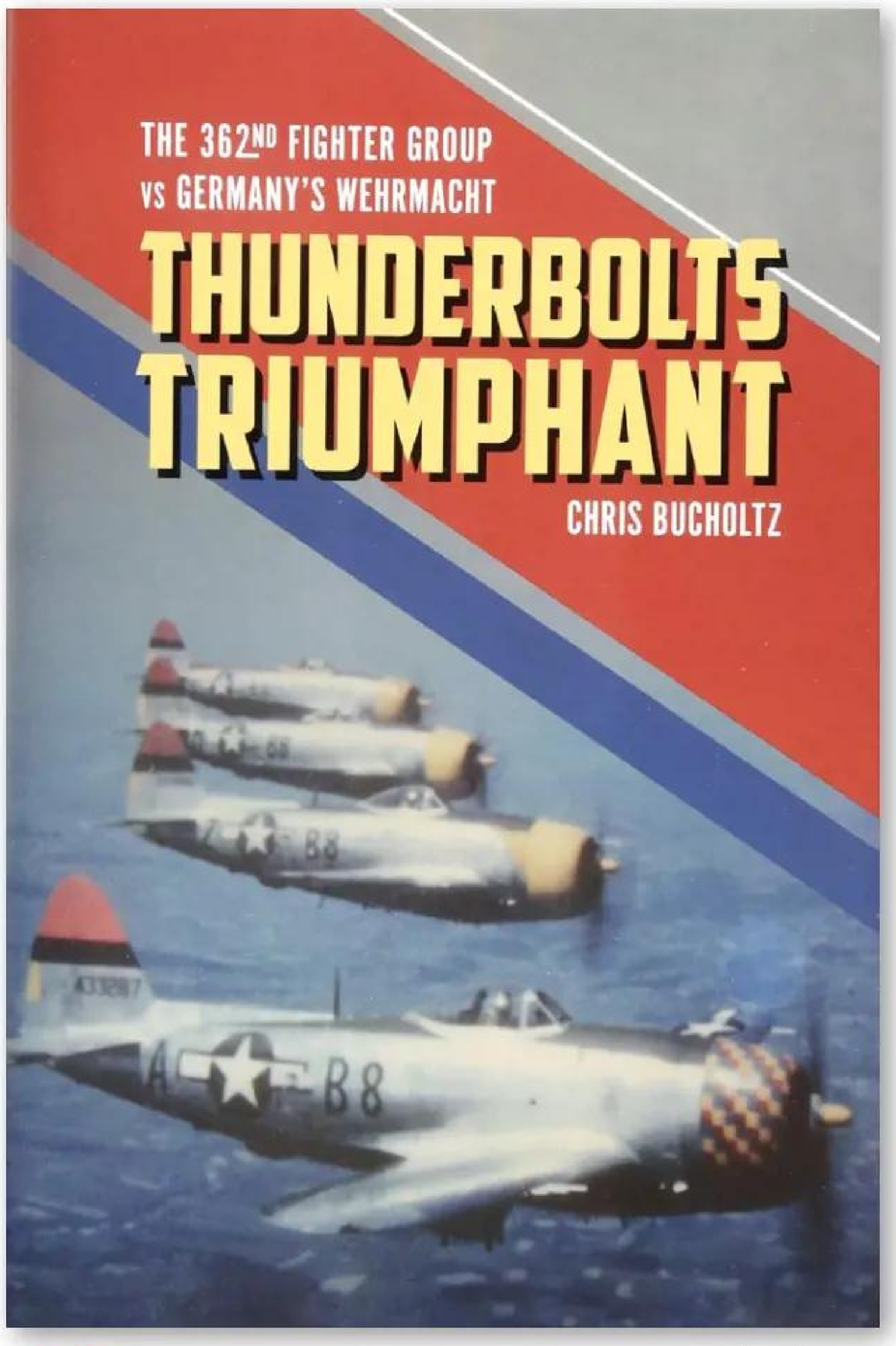
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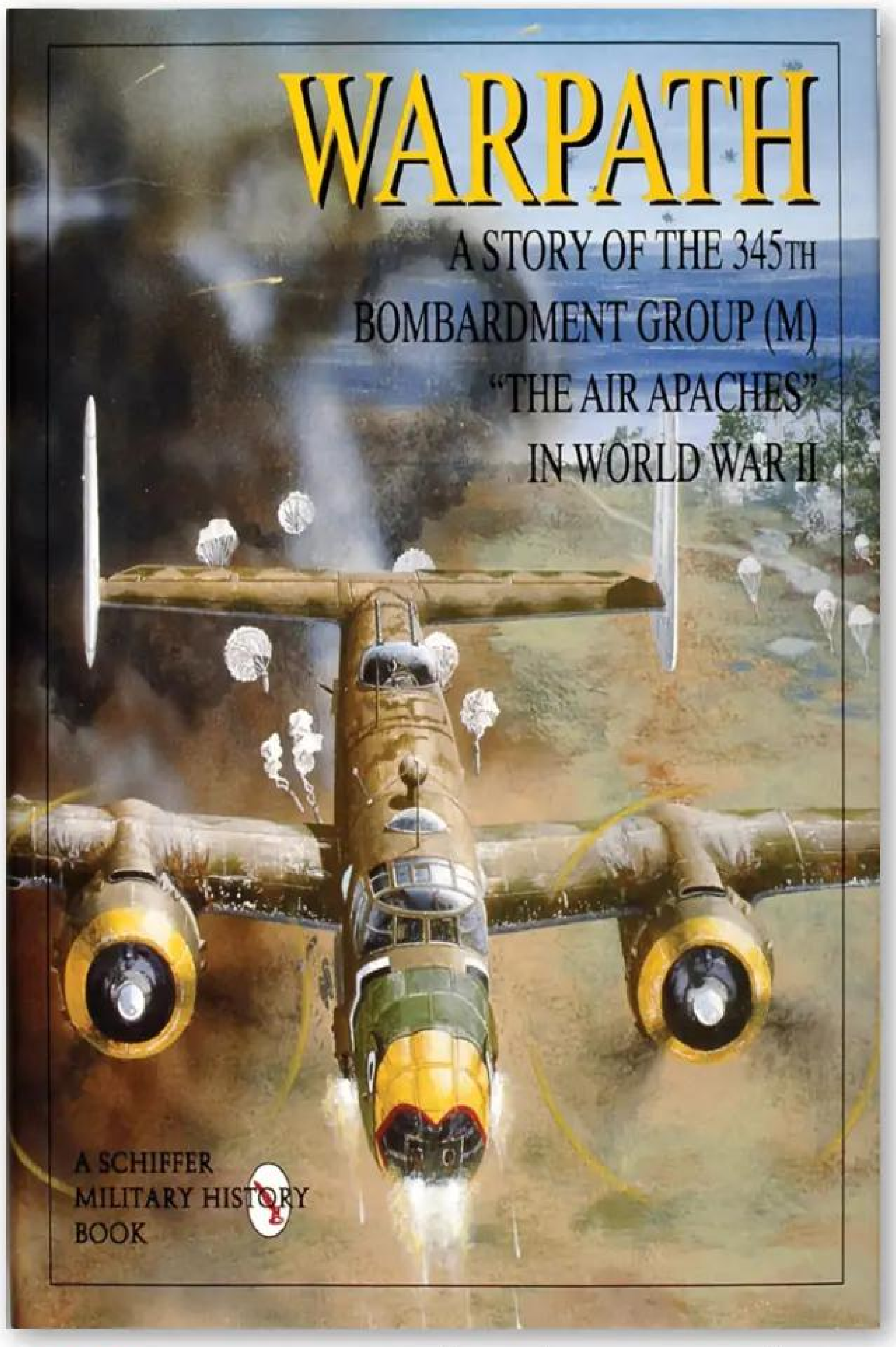
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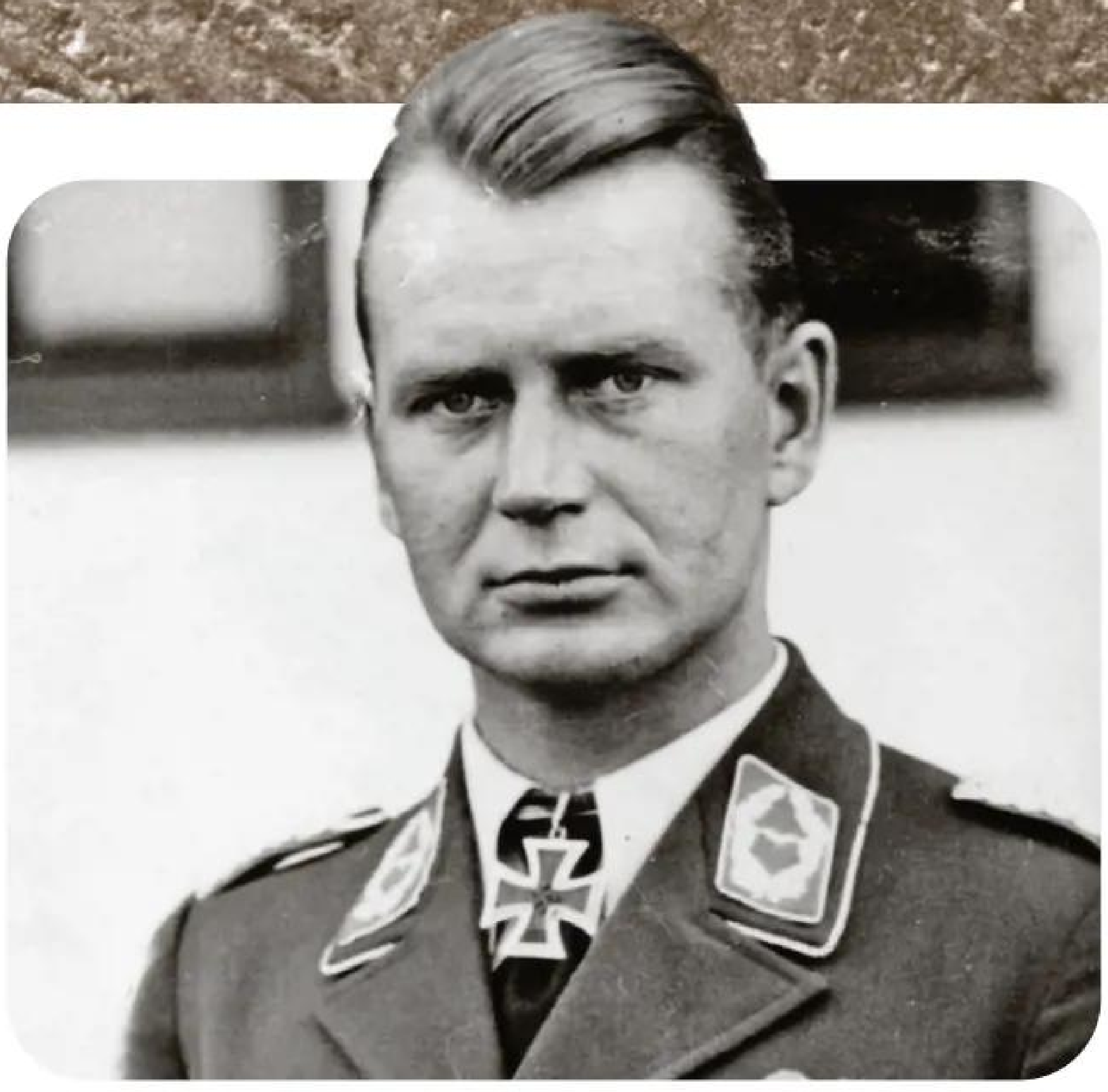

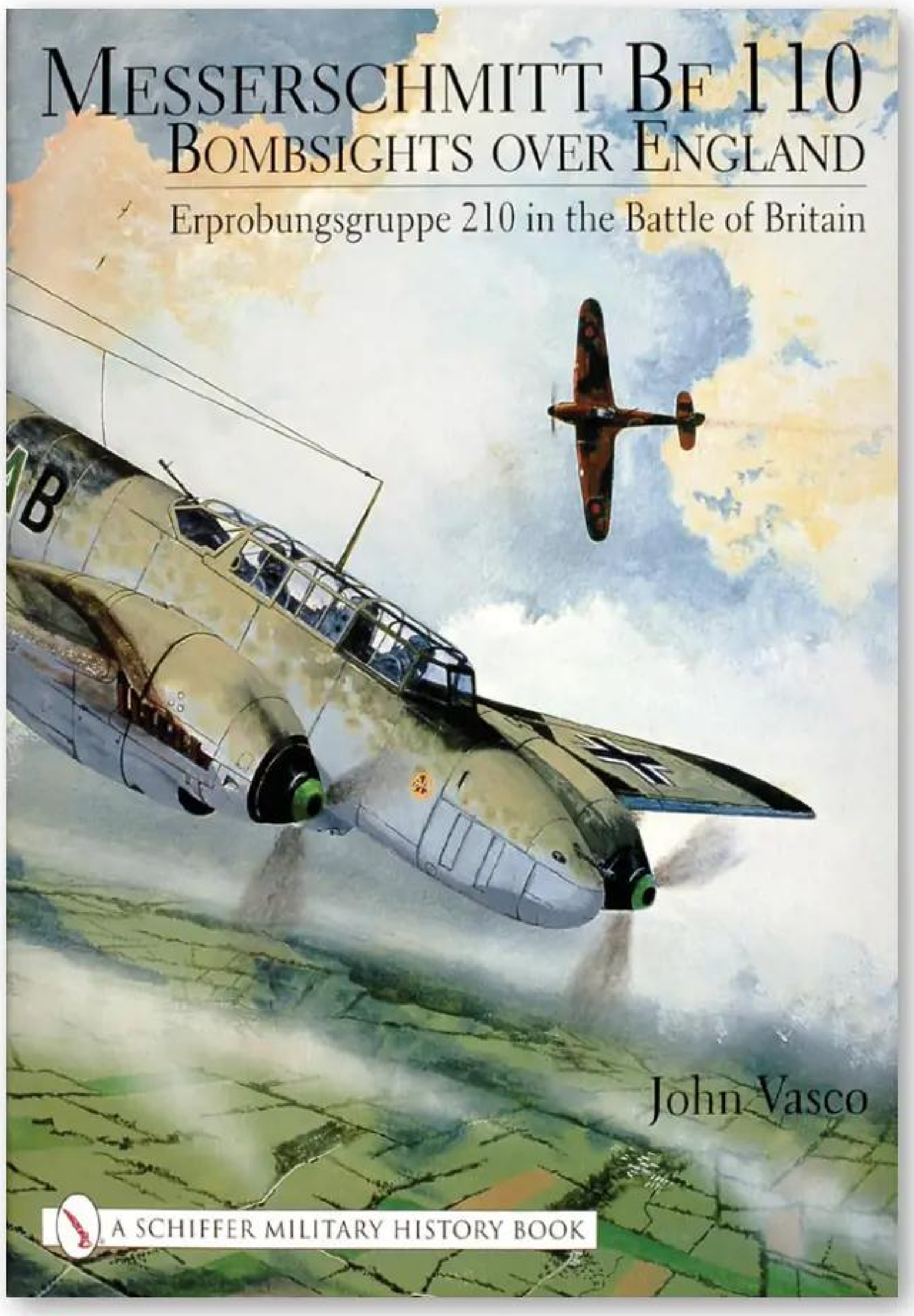
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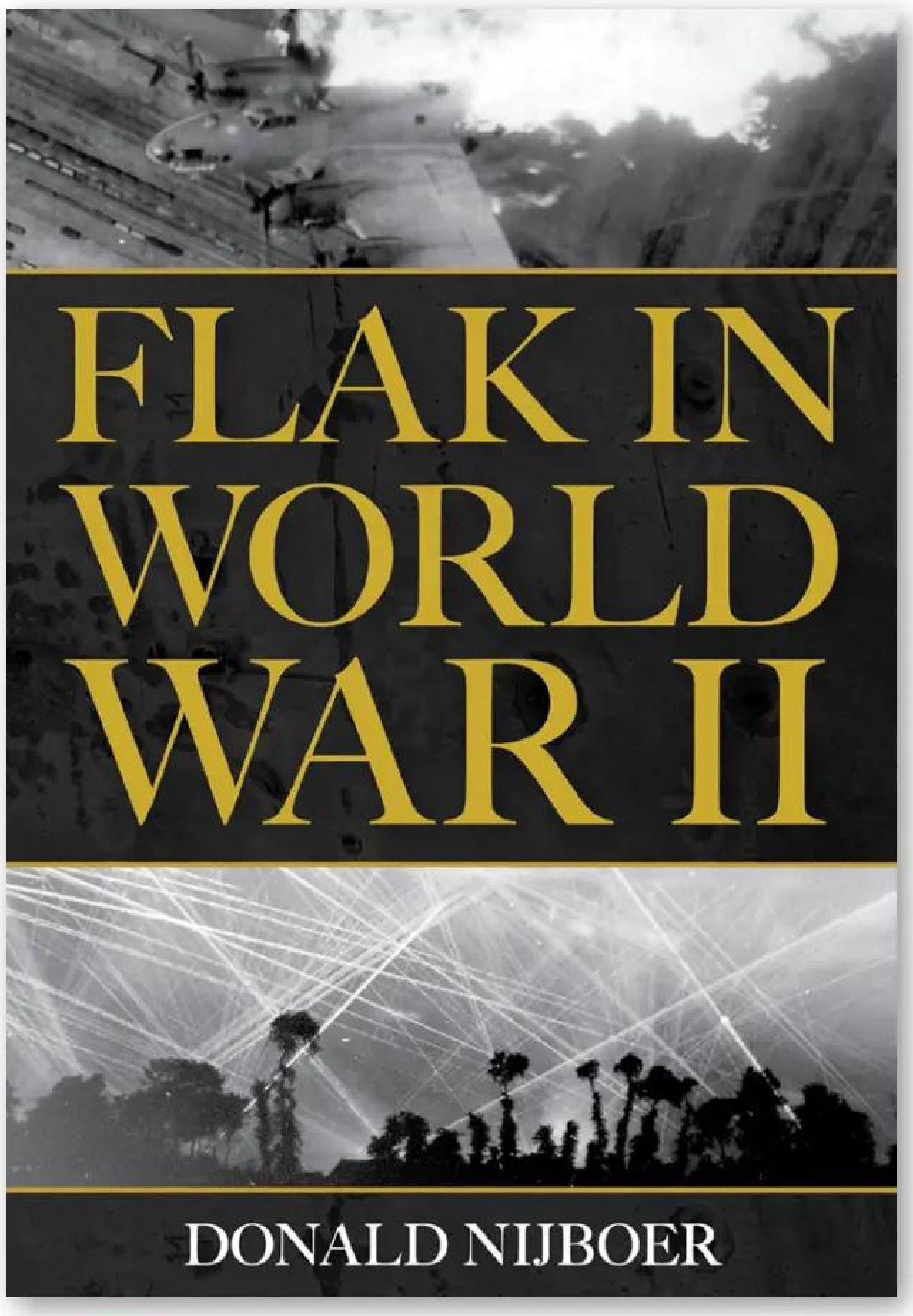
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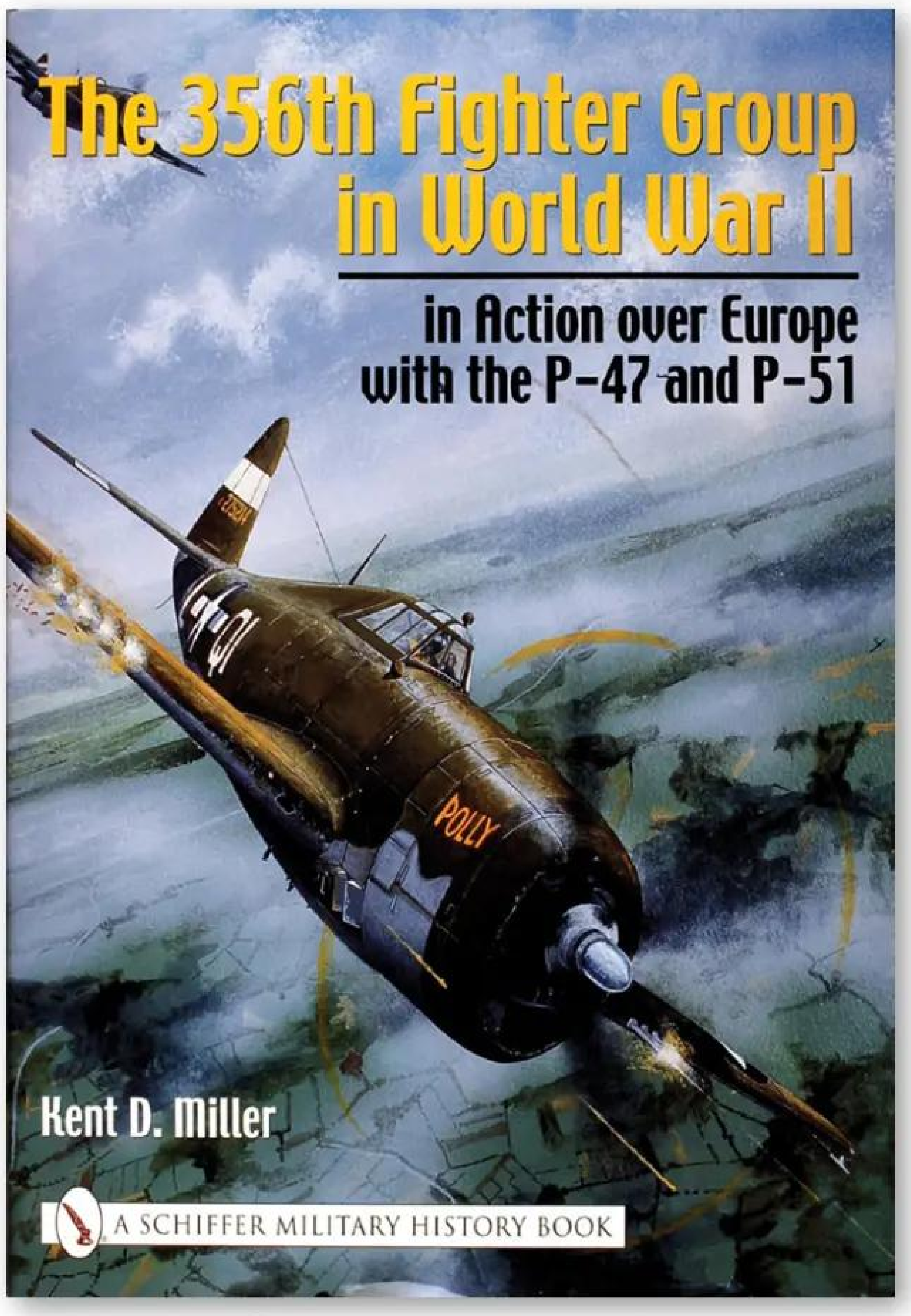
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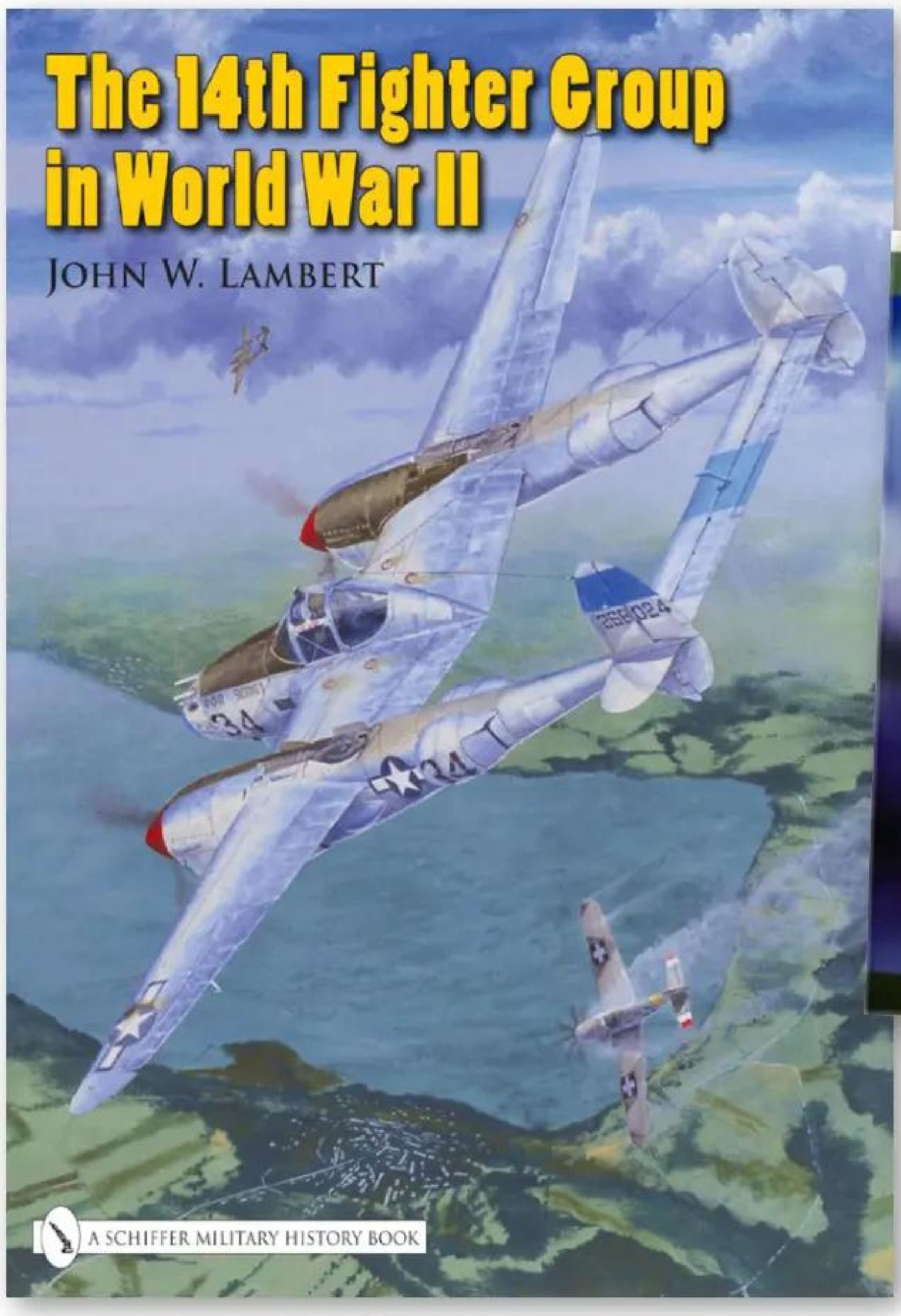
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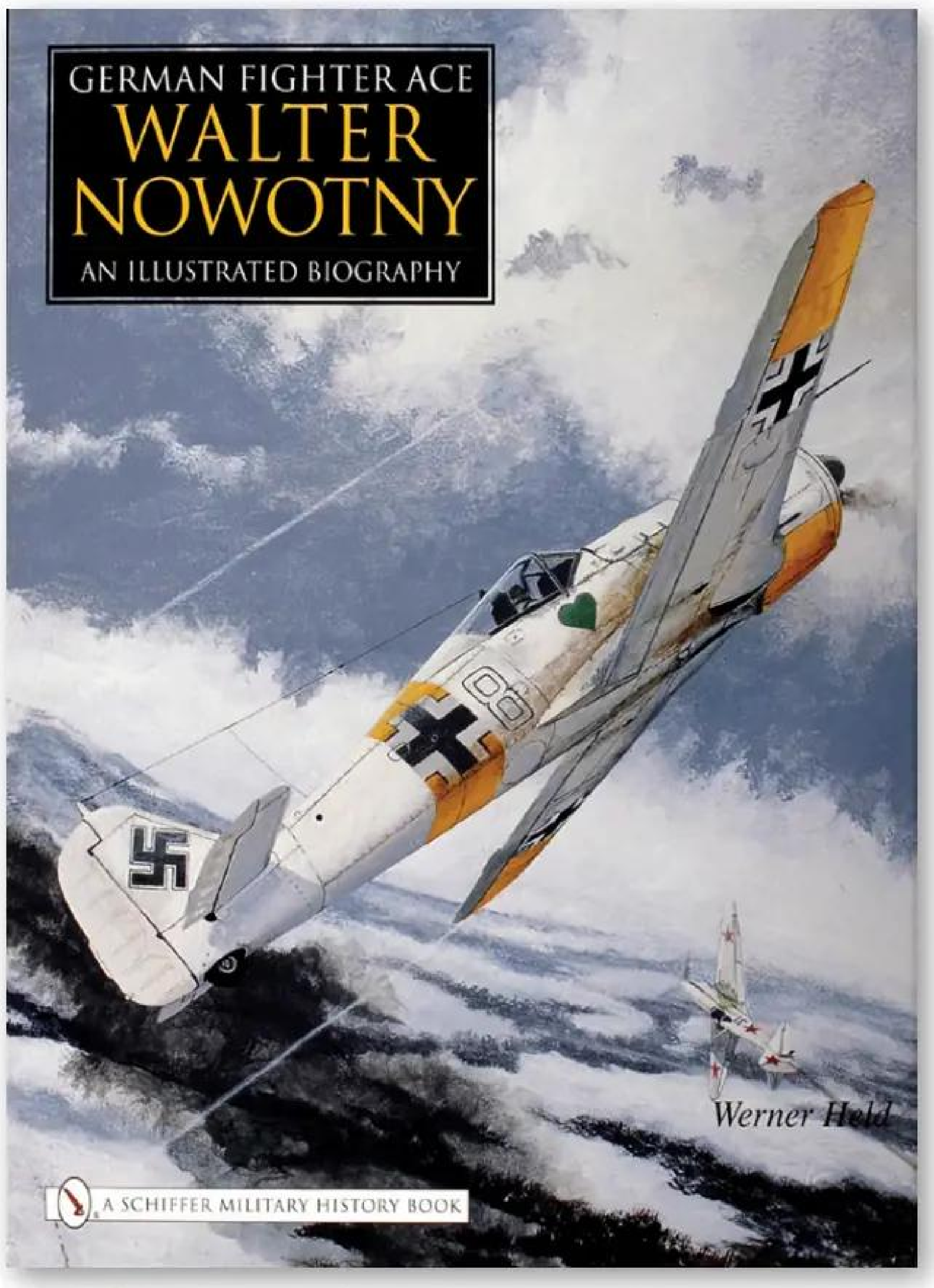
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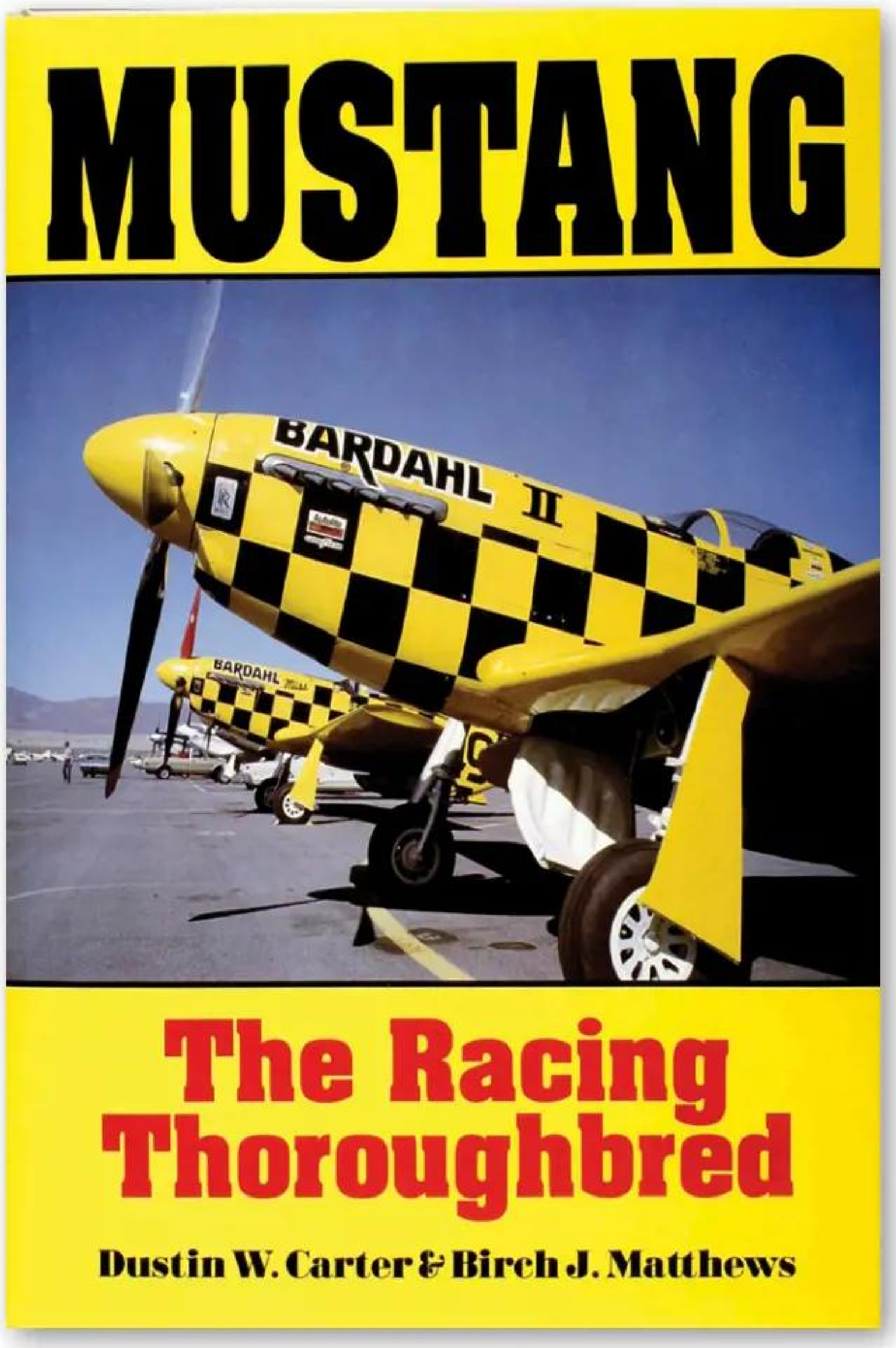
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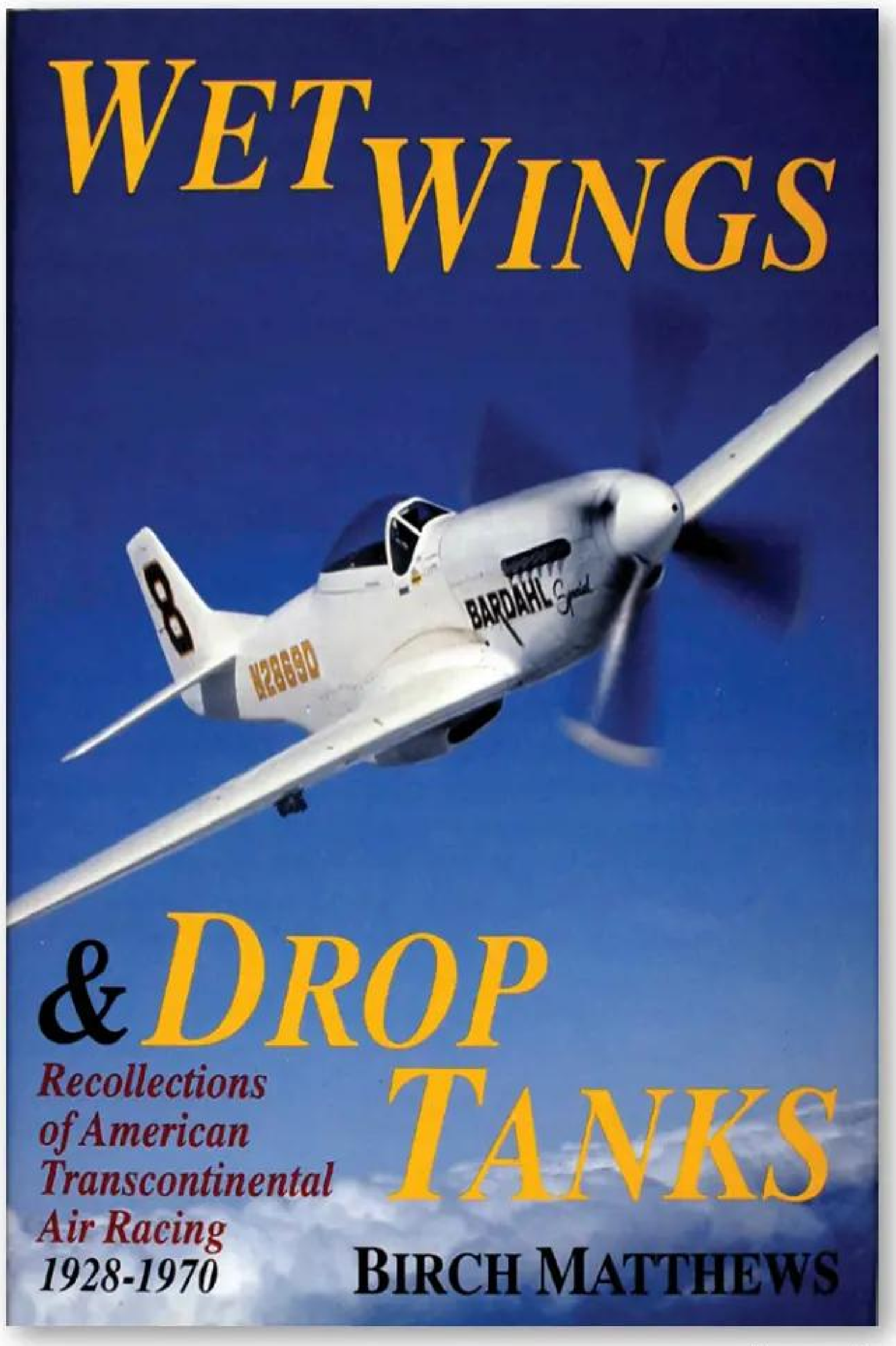
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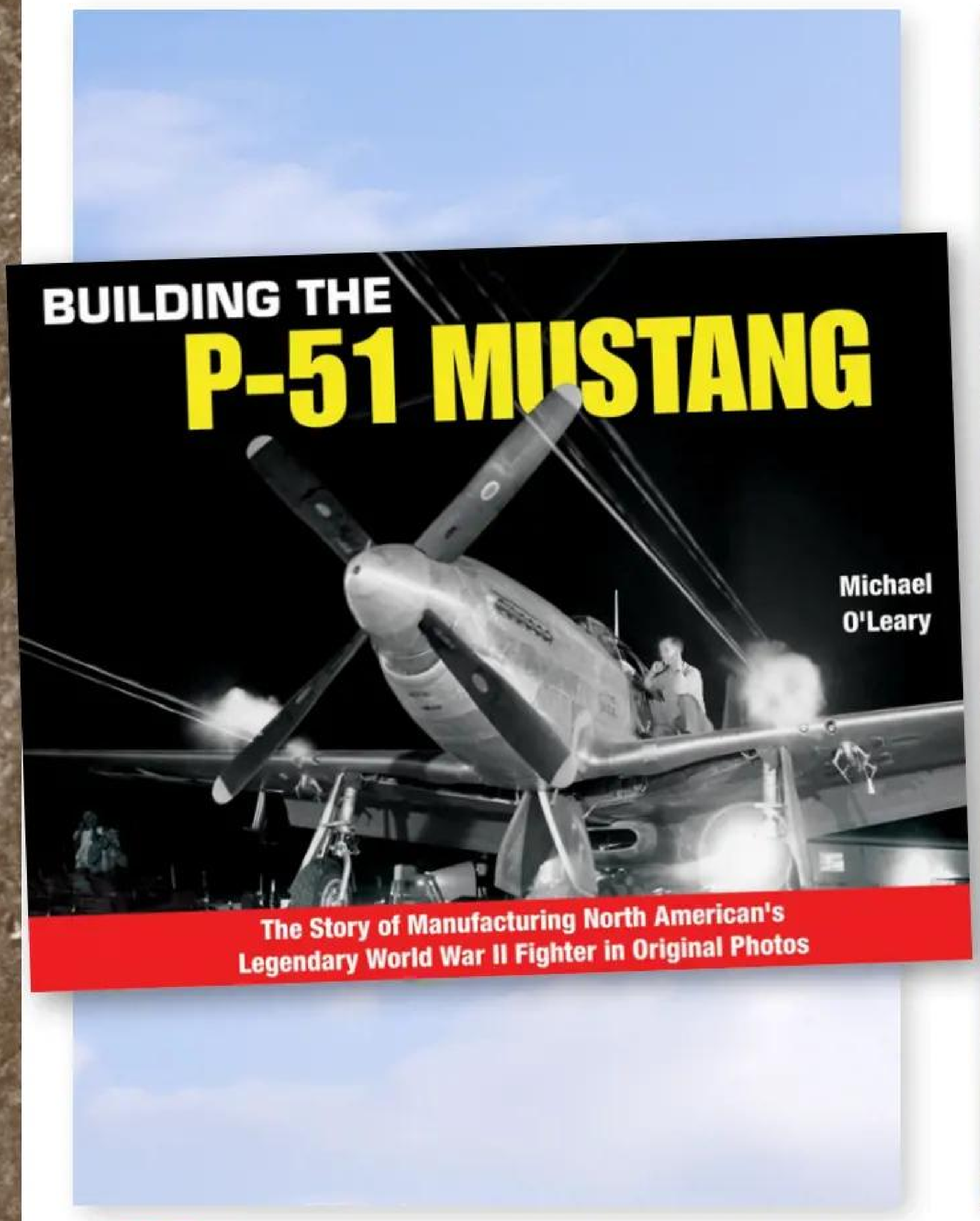
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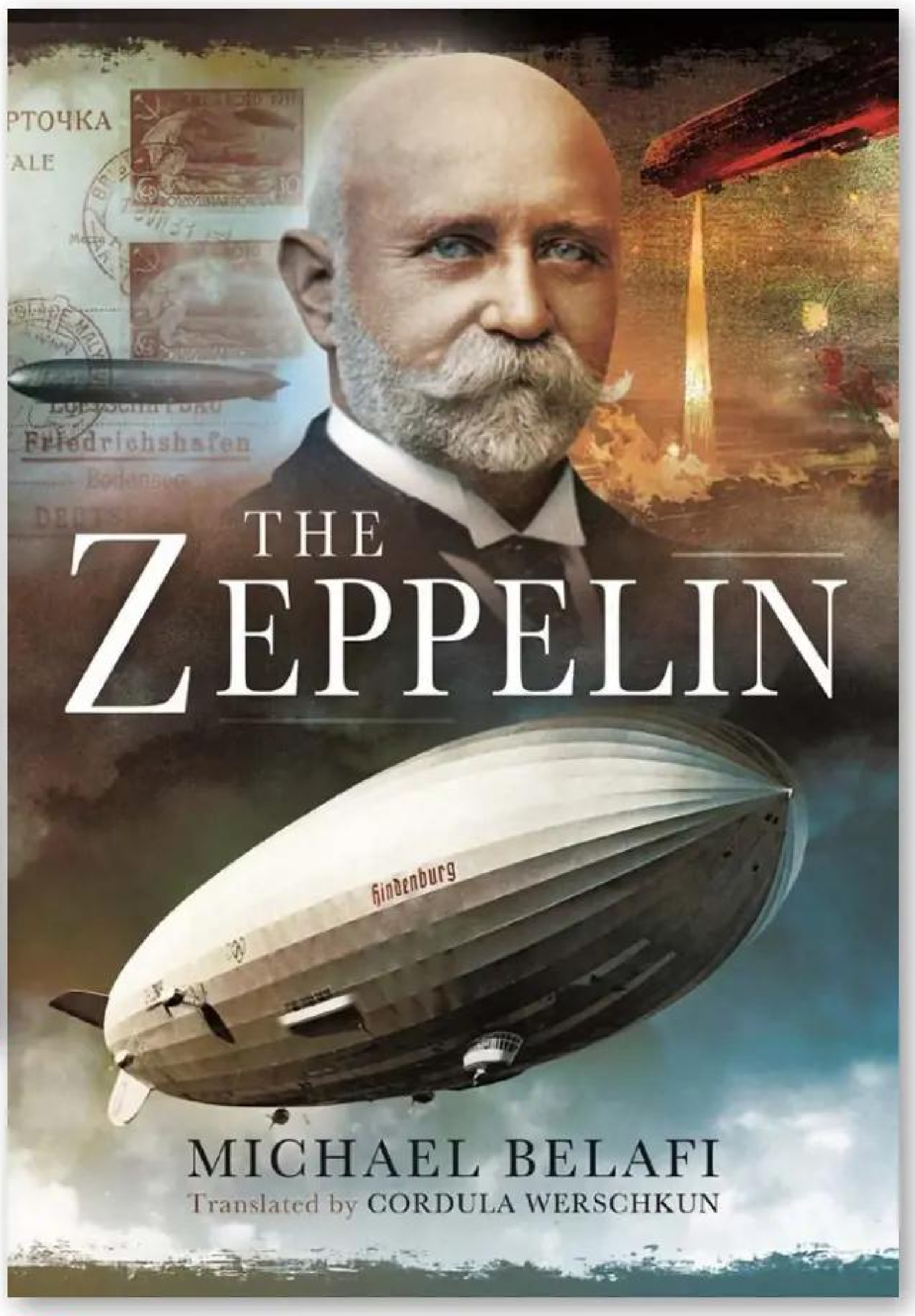
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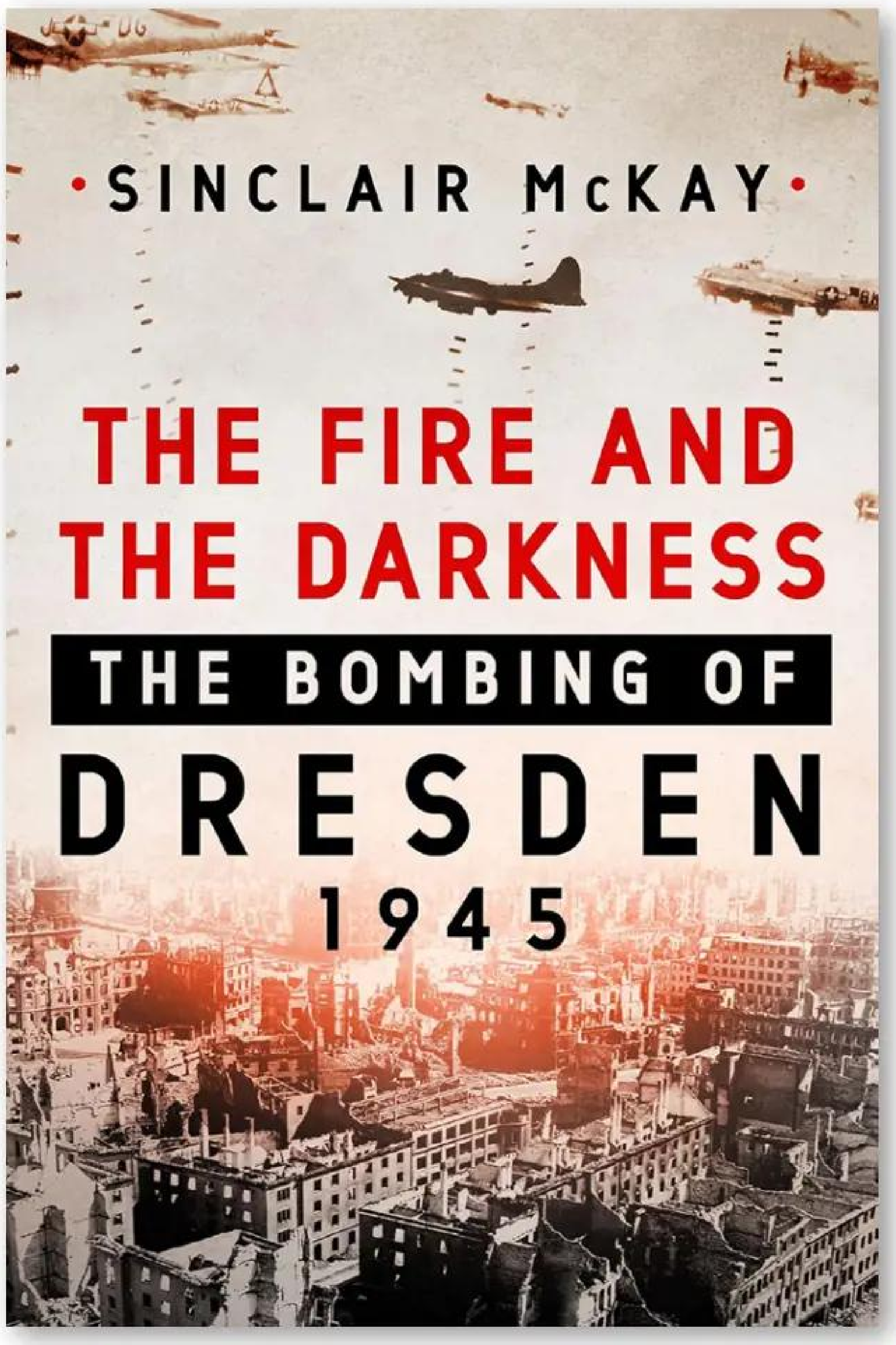
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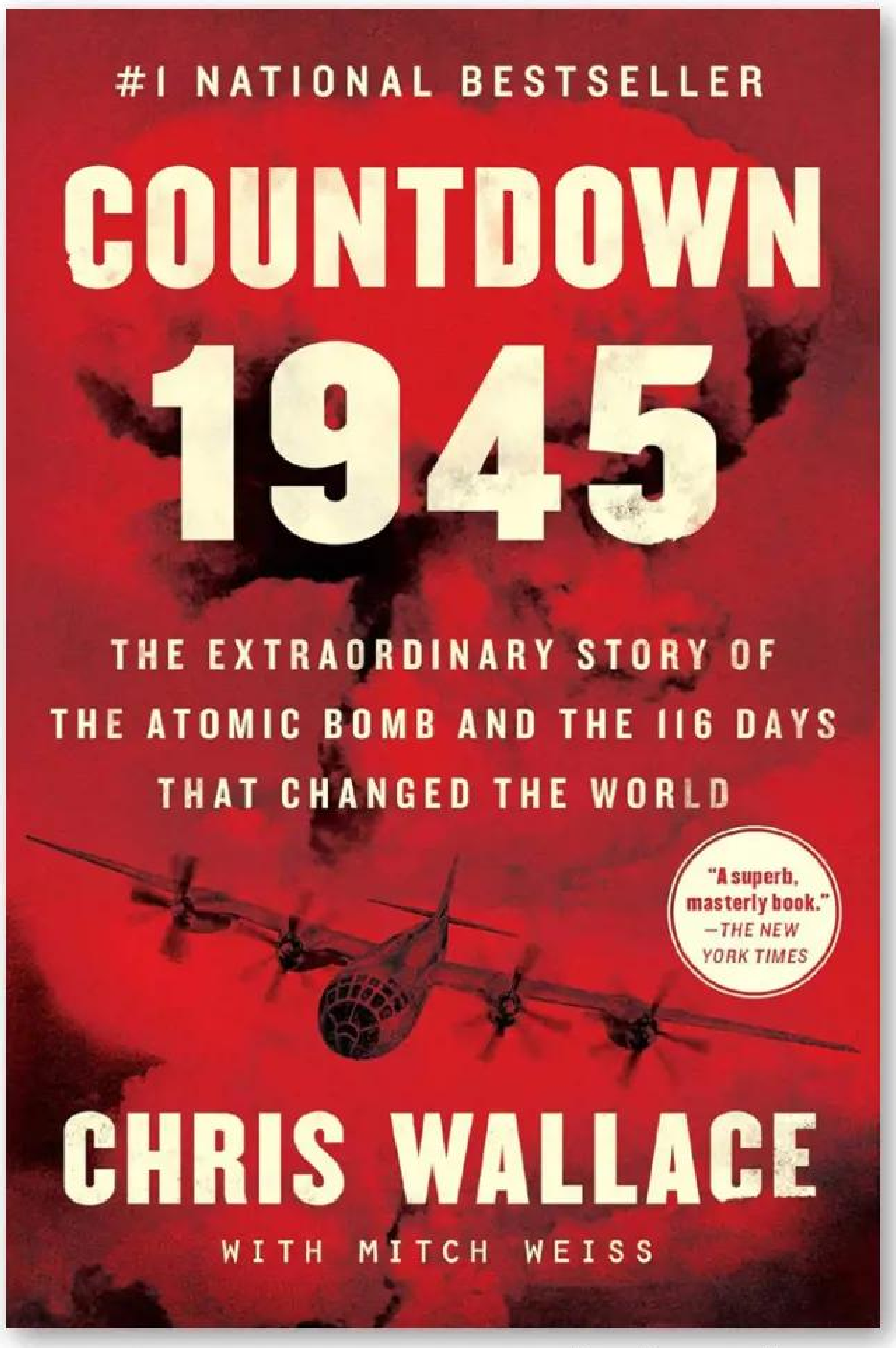
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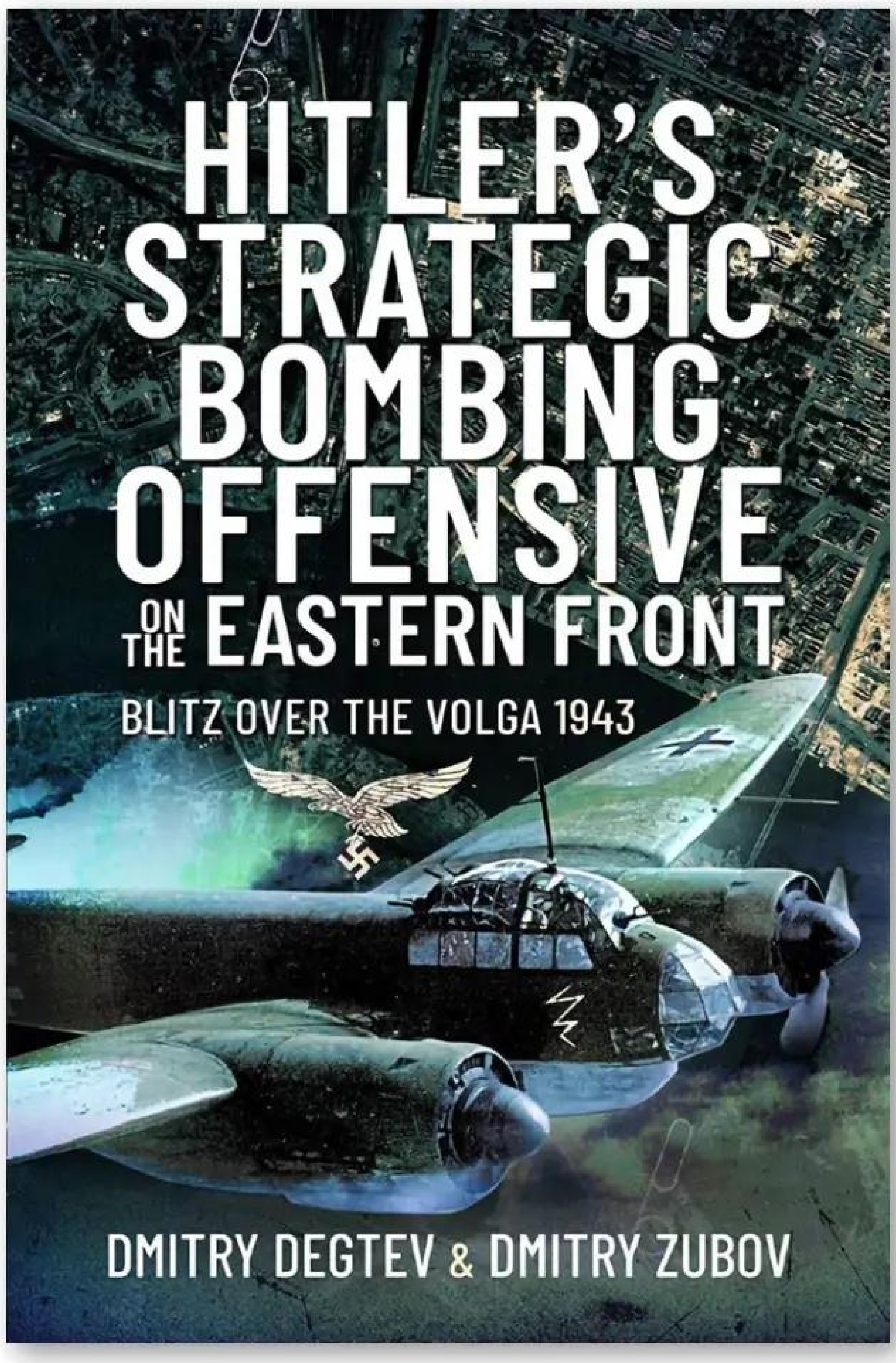
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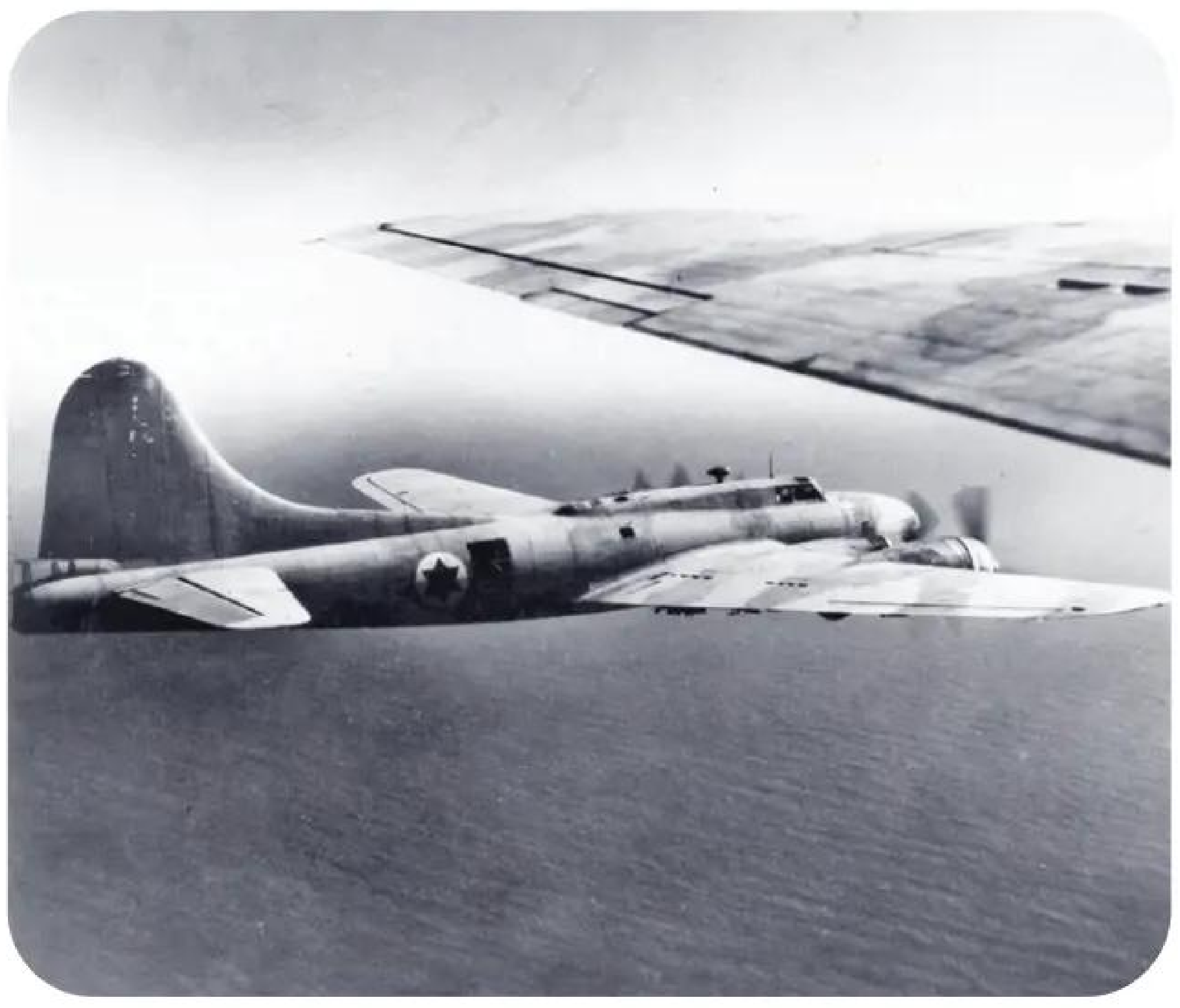

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*(continued from page 19)*

**How about some P-51D canopies?**

of this historic material went to a local aviation museum while the rest, unfortunately, went to the dumpster. As often happens with these types of situations, the archive acquired by the museum found itself heading to its own dumpster in the sky as the leaders of the museum decided it was much more profitable to focus on constantly appreciating hardware (the aircraft — and parts). To these visionaries, disposing of the space-consuming paper items made sense. Don't bother to try to sell the stuff, don't give it to another museum, just throw it out. I have never felt myself below the sport of Dumpster Diving. When I learned the museum was disposing of the material, I loaded a step-ladder in my truck and headed to the designated airport dumpster for the Lockheed material. I did get a few odd looks as I mounted the ladder and then descended into the dumpster. For someone like myself, this particular "dive" had its rewards. I scavenged several sets of factory manuals for Lightnings, Venturas, Harpoons, along with a couple really rare manuals for the Model 10 and Model 12. Also, I was able to pull out a full set of manuals/documents for when Lockheed's Vega division was building Flying Fortresses. Amongst the piles of paper was, at least for me, the real prize. At 500+ pages, a limited printing leatherette-bound manual carried every bit of information on how spares for the P-38 were contracted, manufactured, and then distributed. If you wanted to learn how

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many left wings for the P-38J were built (and why they were built) and then how they were dispersed, the answers were within the yellowing pages. The facts are all in those pages and now my job is to translate that material into something that makes sense and is useful to the readers of *Air Classics*. How many copies of this manual were printed? Hard to say, but probably not many.

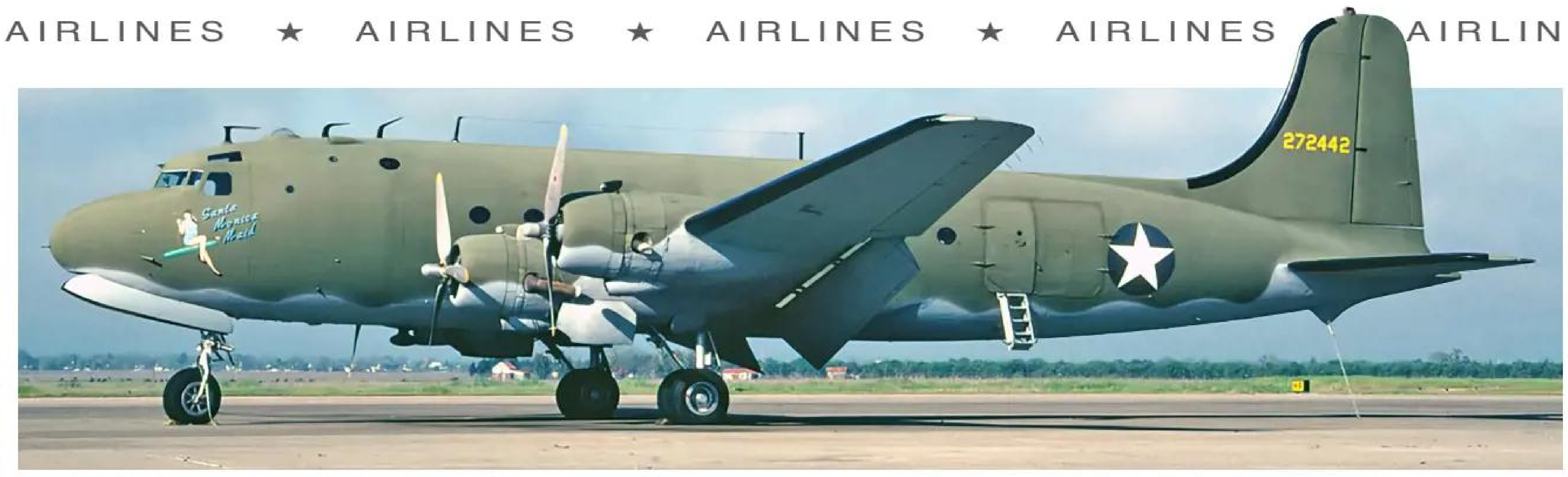
Then we come to the shoe leather part. During WWII, America overbuilt, then overbuilt, and then overbuilt some more. That is why over eight decades later we still have new in original packaging parts for virtually every WWII American aircraft. A long time ago, I decided that southern California was a rich resource for these parts. There were dozens upon dozens of surplus outlets on San Fernando Boulevard and the other streets that surrounded Burbank Airport and Lockheed. With the end of the war, vast quantities of spares were sold for almost nothing. Some of these dealers resold parts at huge profit to foreign air forces and airlines that were operating Lockheed aircraft. Other parts served to maintain civil aircraft such as the photo recon Lightnings that were producing modern charts of previously unmapped portions of North and South America. For someone like myself, I was looking for identifiable components that could easily be displayed and this led to obtaining P-51B windscreens, P-38 control yokes, a P-51D rudder, rudder pedals, sets of cowl, and so forth.

Areas around the airfields that operated or maintained WWII aircraft could provide good hunting grounds. An *Air Classics* reader that was researching pre-war race pilot Art Chester had learned that Chester (who designed the engine installation and cowl for the NA-73X) went to work for North American as a Mustang test pilot but Art always had a strong work ethic and he created the company that built the beautiful spinners for the Mustang. Our reader discovered that the building still existed near LAX and he drove over to take a few photos. To his dismay, he found the structure was being destroyed. However, it was also being carefully disassembled to get the valuable rafter wood that was sold on to build the "western-style" mansions erected for the southern California folks moving to Montana and Wyoming. He talked with the project manager and was let in to take some photos. In the rafters that had not yet been disassembled was a perfect P-51D spinner. A few dollars were exchanged and our reader now had the find of a lifetime.

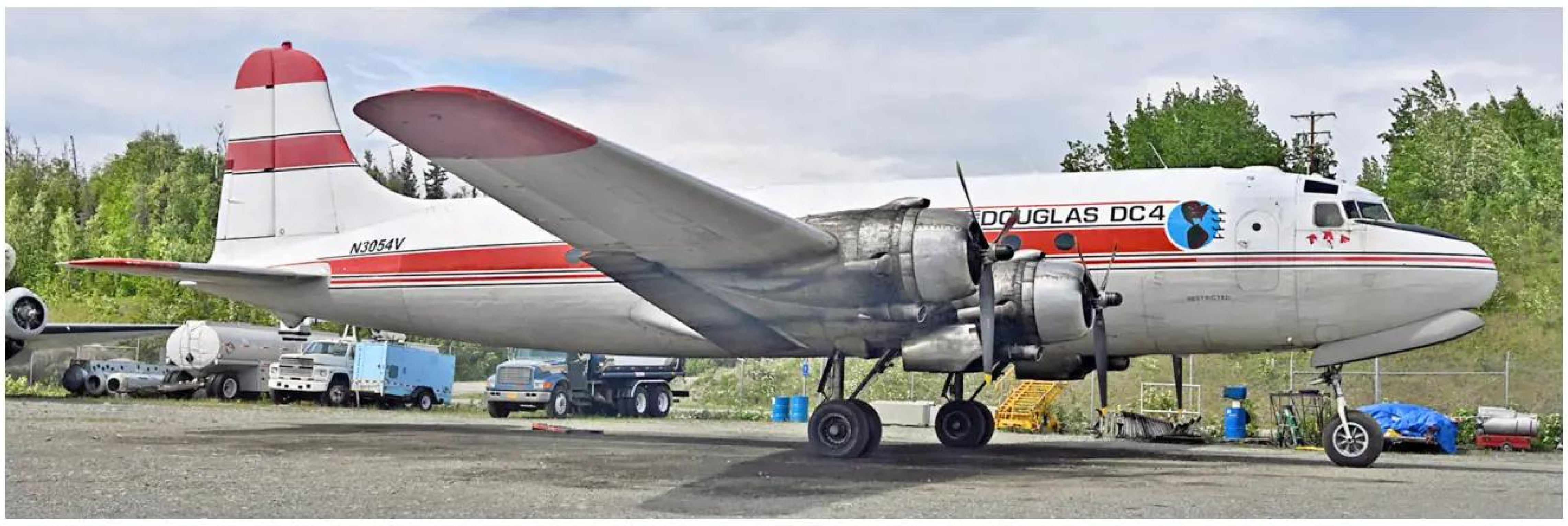
**Connie literally had rows of Merlins for sale — as a group.**

More recently, a young reader had taken it upon himself to visit a large industrial complex being demolished near the former Glendale Grand Central Air Terminal. After WWII and during the Korean War, many Mustangs were overhauled and shipped to foreign air forces and South Korea. We do not know the exact number of Mustangs overhauled at Grand Central (Lockheed was also subcontracting at Burbank along with Pacific Aero for Mustangs desperately need in the Korean War) but the number was well over 100. His search paid off (in more ways than one) and he discovered two somewhat battered P-51D tail cones, a left landing gear leg, and a few other pieces including a slightly bent Hamilton-Standard prop blade. He was very exciting by his find and stopped by our office to proudly show off his discovery. He then concluded a deal with *Air Classics* that was satisfactory to both parties and the components are now with the other finds we have accumulated over the years. As Mark says, keep on hunting — the parts are still out there! **AC**

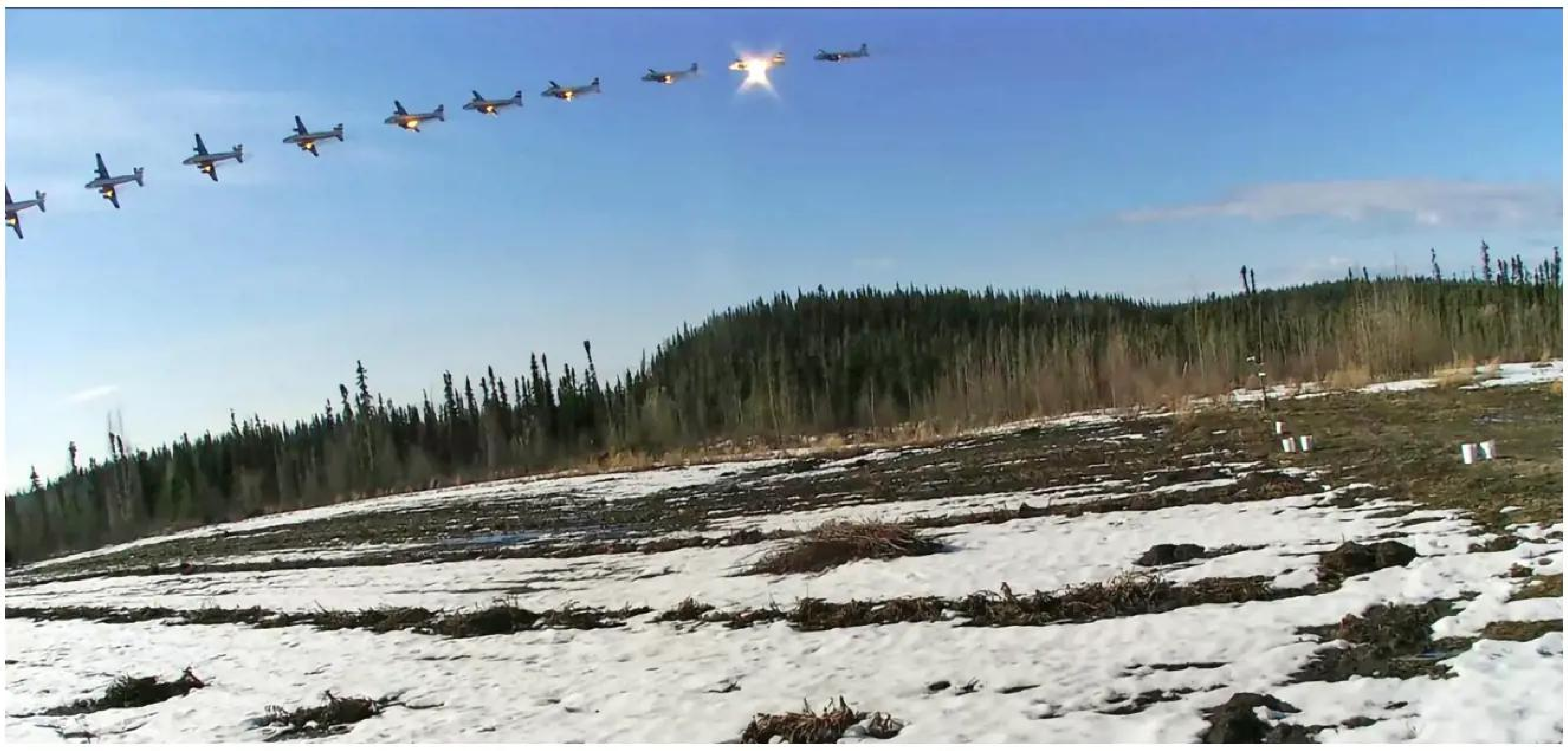
# LARGE AIRCRAFT AND SAVING A RARE HANGAR



C-54 *Santa Monica Maid* when operated by Aero Union.



The C-54D as N3054V flown by Alaska Air Fuel.



A chilling sequence showing the wing explosion and the C-54's loss of control.

I agree with the recent comments in *Air Classics* about the big Warbirds. There are not many around (EDITOR'S NOTE: And their number is rapidly decreasing with the mass scrapping at Greybull) and I believe the dedication and cost associated with them is overwhelming to most individuals. Even owning and maintaining the "smaller" twin Warbirds like the B-25, A-26, DC-3, and HU-16 is a daunting task and one only accomplished by mega-bucks, total dedication, and a large crew. Having owned some of these planes, I still have the passion but perhaps not the means to keep up with the ever-increasing costs. Most of the younger generation do not have the needed passion for these types of aircraft and for the few that do, then they do not have the required funding.

When I flew for Aero Union, they had an extra Douglas C-54 Skymaster (N76AU) and thought of airshowing the plane and then selling it. Named *Santa Monica Maid*, they painted the plane in Olive Drab and Neutral Gray with WWII markings. I thought it was about the best thing since sliced cheese! However, no interest came forward. Some of my buddies and I still talk about doing a C-54, but when you start looking at the costs, the time it takes, and our ages, it just doesn't pencil out and that is too bad.

On a more positive note, the Pacific Coast Air Museum here at Santa Rosa, California, received a donation from Craig Schulz — son of Peanuts' creator Charles Schulz — to rebuild the field's WWII Butler Hangar. Work started this spring and they are moving right along. The new corrugated roof is almost installed and when completed, Craig is going to donate his P-40 to put inside the Butler Hangar, one of two original WWII buildings still standing at the airport from when it was the Santa Rosa Army Airfield. The hangar was used in the movie *Mad Mad World* for the sequence when the Twin Beech (N63158 — a converted AT-11) is flown through the structure. Paul Mantz initially flew a camera-equipped Stearman through the hangar and this footage was used to create the process shot of Mickey Rooney and Buddy Hackett piloting the Twin Beech. When it came time for Tallman to fly the Twin Beech through the hangar, several cameras were set up outside the structure to capture the dramatic stunt and the abrupt pull-up to avoid the eucalyptus trees and power lines on the exit side of the hangar. So, with the constant reports about vintage airport structures being destroyed this is a little bit of positive news.

Mickey Rooney and Buddy Hackett prepare to fly through the Butler Hangar at Santa Rosa Airport. This montage footage was taken when Paul Mantz flew a Stearman through the hangar.

*Steve Penning*
*Santa Rosa, CA*

**Frank Tallman prepares to enter the hangar in the converted AT-11. Note the trees and powerlines that caused a steep pull-up.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE:* I certainly recall *Santa Monica Maid* and an epic photo flight we made with the aircraft after it received its WWII markings. It was very frustrating that the Skymaster was not really accepted into the airshow community. The C-54 was one of our most important military aircraft — WWII, Berlin Airlift (memories of which are kept alive by the C-54 flown by the Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation), Korean War, Vietnam War and then as a civilian passenger liner, cargo hauler, and fire-bomber. The aircraft Steve mentions, N76AU, did not find an airshow slot but it did continue on doing what it did best — flying and serving the needs of the operators. N76AU flew with the USAAF/USAF, US Navy, and Royal Air Force for 31 years. In 2001, the aircraft was purchased by Alaska Air Fuel and became N3054V. Between 2016 and 2020, it was rebuilt and on 23 April 2024, the Skymaster departed Fairbanks International on a flight to Kobuk Airport. The aircraft was transporting 3400 gallons of unleaded fuel and two 100-gallon propane tanks. The C-54D's tanks had been filled with 1300 gallons of 100LL. Three minutes after departure, witnesses saw smoke coming from the #1 R-2600 and the pilot reported an onboard fire and that they were turning back. Then there was a bright explosion seen coming from the engine and wing and the plane entered an uncontrolled descent before crashing and exploding. The two pilots had an accumulated flight time of over 47,000 hours. The cause of the disaster was traced to one of those mundane factors that so often result in the loss of an aircraft. One week prior to the accident, the #1 engine had been replaced with a freshly-overhauled R-2600 from Anderson Airmotive. A small fuel leak had developed in the outboard fuel tank of the left wing near #1 engine. A repair was attempted the day before the final flight but this did not fix the leak. This allowed a small amount of fuel to collect behind the #1 engine. After takeoff, the NTSB could not determine why the #1 engine lost power after takeoff. The crew then attempted to feather the engine. When the feathering pump was activated, that is when the final problem came into play. The AN bulkhead fitting had a B-nut installed but it was not attached to the corresponding oil hose. The exhaust system was covered by external oil residue and the propellers were situated between the feathered and unfeathered position. The propeller feathering system of the C-54 utilizes an oil hose that connects to the feathering pump mounted on the engine firewall. Oil flows through the system to feather the propeller when commanded. When the feathering pump activated, the incorrectly installed B-nut resulted in the hose producing a spray of oil around the exhaust system. The fire that started eventually made contact with the fuel that had dripped and accumulated into the space behind #1 engine, igniting it. The explosion resulted in the separation of the aileron bell housing, causing loss of control and impact with terrain.

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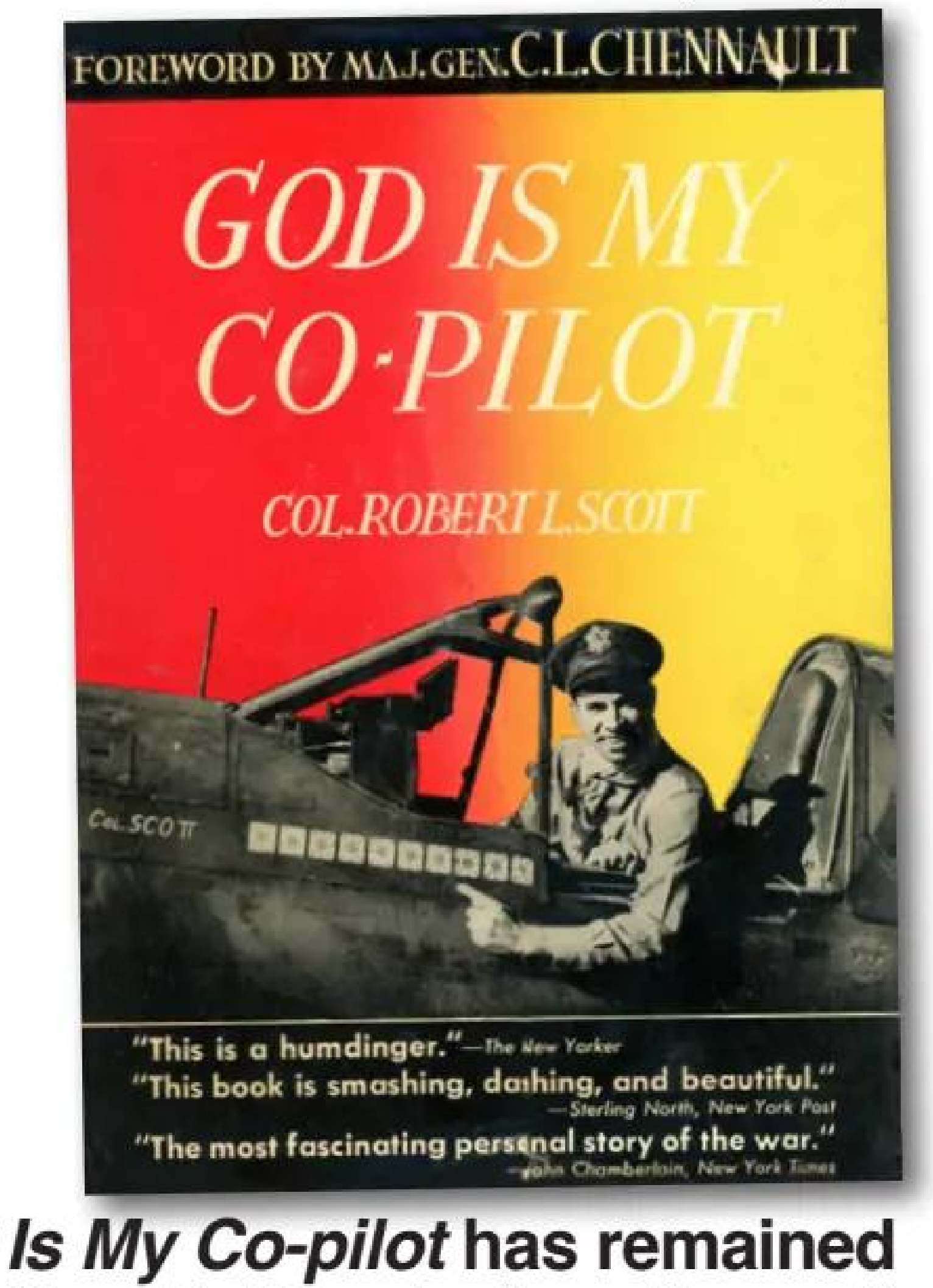
# THOSE INFLUENTIAL BOOKS

I very much enjoyed Ben Marsh's "Three Pilots and an Albatros." I have been flying since 1978 and am still active as a flight instructor. It's hard to believe that 47 years have passed. I thought about your question at the end of Ben's fine article as to what book influenced me to fly. There were many but one title comes to mind almost immediately: Col. Robert L. Scott's *God Is My Copilot*. Scott fought in the CBI during WWII. It was one of the books my sixth-grade class had to choose from for our first reading assignment. I loved the book and never forgot it. I still have the paperback copy I read in the sixth grade so many years ago — threadbare, yellowed, but still serviceable!


FOREWORD BY MAJ.GEN.C.L.CHENNAULT
GOD IS MY CO-PILOT
COL.ROBERT L.SCOTT
"This is a humdinger."—The New Yorker
"This book is smashing, dashing, and beautiful."—Sterling North, New York Post
"The most fascinating personal story of the war."—John Chamberlain, New York Times

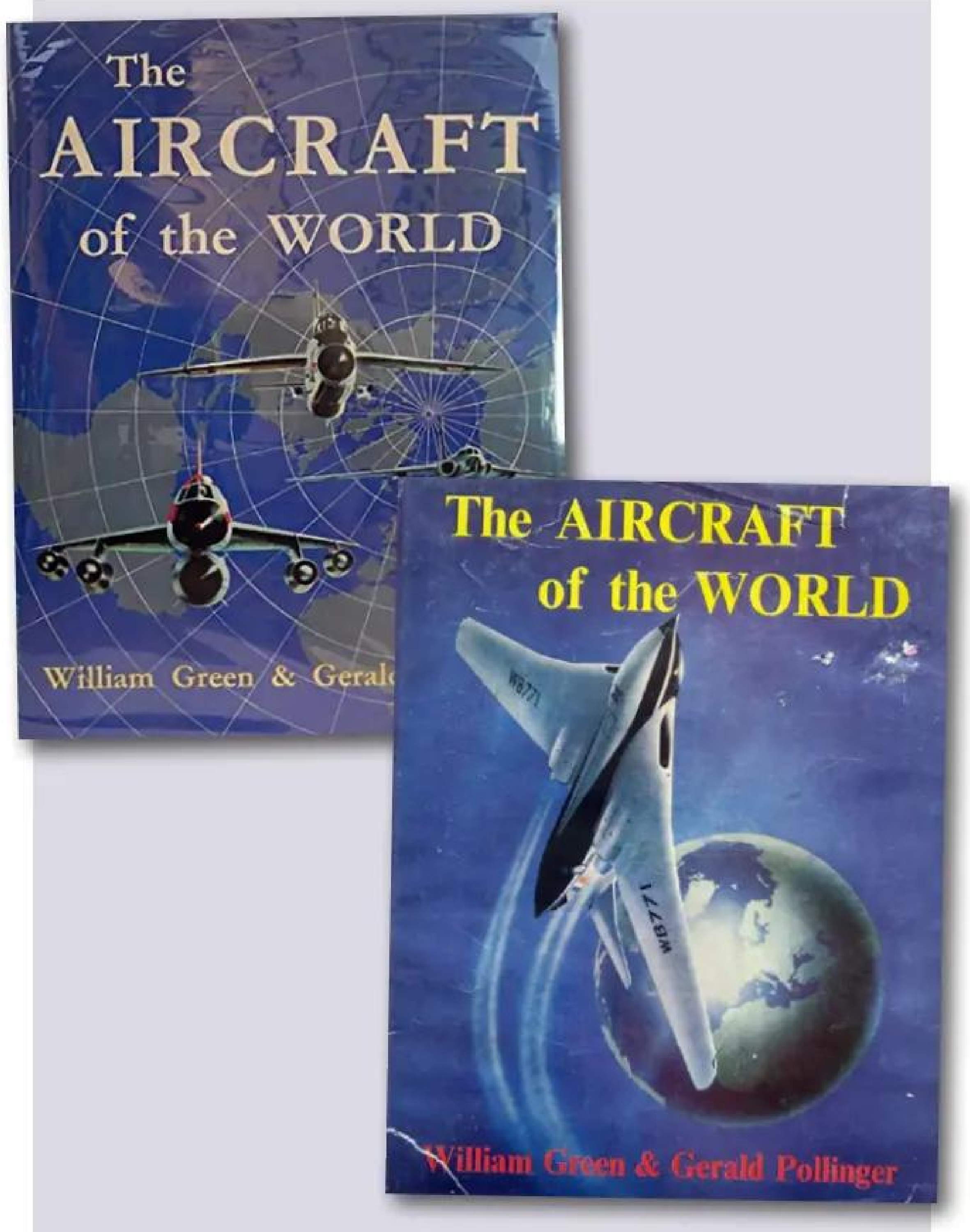
***God Is My Co-pilot* has remained an influential book since it was first published and has gone through many editions. Colonel Scott visited our offices on numerous occasions and it was always enlightening to speak with him.**

While I'm at it, I would like to thank you for publishing the "new" version of *Air Classics*. I have been a subscriber since probably the early 1970s and purchased individual copies prior to that. The new format is fabulous and makes for great reading for aviation history fans. It is undoubtedly my favorite magazine and I look forward to reading every issue from cover to cover. I read your "Message From the Publisher" column the first thing upon receiving every new issue. Our world is certainly changing and the things we enjoy are rapidly disappearing. Lastly, I got to meet you and fly a photo mission as copilot in the Yankee Air Force's Mitchell during the 2003 Thunder Over Michigan Airshow.

*Henry R. Black*
*St. Clair Shores, MI*

When I was about eleven-years-old, I was gifted with a copy of *The Aircraft of the World* by William Green and Gerald Pollinger. The edition that I got was the one that had head-on views of a Convair B-58, English Electric Lightning, and Tupolev jet bomber on the cover. After unwrapping my present, I recall going through the book page-by-page, completely fascinated by the photos and all the data on what seemed to be a mind-boggling array of aircraft. The book really kicked off my interest in aviation — something I already had but now I owned a well-illustrated volume to help me in my quest for more knowledge. As I got older and was able to purchase my own aviation books, I would buy anything by William Green. His knowledge was encyclopedic and his writing style was smooth and informed. I still have that copy of *The Aircraft of the World* and it is still a very relevant book and I often refer to it for facts and figures. More recently, I was able to find an earlier edition, the one with the magnificent painting of the Handley Page Victor prototype circling the globe, and added that to my collection of well over 1000 books on aviation history. I would encourage anyone with an interest in aircraft to collect Mr. Green's books.

*Fred Roberts*
*Ft. Worth, TX* **AC**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**Both editions of *The Aircraft of the World* are still very useful.**

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